NOTE TO USERS

Magic as a Boundary : the Case of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*

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Abstracts

Par ce mémoire, je tente de démontrer que, dans l'Antiquité tardive, la religion ne pouvait être définie sans son opposé, la magie. Assumant que la définition de la magie par rapport à la religion est le symptôme de chocs culturels, je considère le De Mysteriis *de Jamblique (240-325 après J.-C.) comme une tentative de réorganisation politico-religieuse de l'empire Romain.*

La première partie présente une analyse des croyances religieuses de Porphyre (232–305 après J.-C.). Son approche minimise les différences entre la magie et la religion. Par cette analyse, je démontre que Jamblique rectifie l'approche philosophique de Porphyre.

Dans la deuxième partie, je présente la réponse de Jamblique comme étant une réorganisation des faits religieux en un nouveau système holistique, appelé « théurgie ». En me basant sur les théories politiques néoplatoniciennes, je démontre finalement comment le De Mysteriis *lie inséparablement politique et théologie.*

With this paper, I aim to demonstrate that, in Late Antiquity, the definition of magic was inherent to the definition of its opposite, religion. Assuming that the separation of magic and religion is the symptom of cultural clashes, I argue that Iamblichus' (240-325 AD) De Mysteriis *was participating in a politico-religious reorganization of the Roman Empire.*

The first part of the study analyzes the religious beliefs of Porphyry (232–305 AD). With this analysis, I demonstrate that Iamblichus rectified Porphyry's philosophical approach to religion, which minimized the distinctions between magic and religion.

In the second part of the study, I demonstrate how Iamblichus' response to Porphyry rearranged religious evidence into a new holistic system called "theurgy." By drawing from Neoplatonic political theory, I also explain how the De Mysteriis *inseparably bounded politics with theology.*

Abbreviations

ANRW = H. TEMPORINI. (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt : Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, De Gruyter, 1972-2004.

(DIELS-KRANZ) = *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, edited and translated by W. KRANZ & H. DIELS, Weidmann, 1951-52.

DM = IAMBLICHUS, *On the Mysteries,* translated by E C. Clarke, J. Dillon and H. J. Blumenthal, Society of Biblical Literature, 2003, (Writings from the Greco-Roman world; 4).

PGM = *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells, vol.1 texts,* edited by H.D. BETZ, University of Chicago Press, 1986.

PE = EUSEBIUS, *Preparatio Evangelica,* edited and translated by J. SIRINELLI, E. DES PLACES, G. SCHROEDER & O. ZINK, Cerf, 9 vol., 1979-1991, (*Sources Chrétiennes*; 206, 228, 262, 266, 215, 292, 307, 338, 369).

PL = *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J.-P. MIGNE, Migne, 1844-64.

(SMITH) = PORPHYRY, *Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta*, edited by A. SMITH, Teubner, 1993.

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Rubbish is value denied. It is rendered universally meaningless, but since this is impossible, its meaning returns in an inverted or repressed form to haunt us in disguise, in the form of daydreams, faint odours, noxious pollution.

Ben Watson on the music of Frank Zappa

Magic as a boundary

Suppose that we do as Plotinus liked to, "playing at first before we set out to be serious,"[1] and consider the notion of identity—be it political, religious, cultural or simply ontological—as needing a radical opposition of terms in order to be conceived. Moreover, let's say that this opposition not only entails the polarization of two entities, but that it also aligns on the same "front" two parallel series of oppositions: a cultural opposition (same/different), and more importantly for the topic, an ethical opposition (good/evil). This is the premise of this study: that thinking the world as a sum of entities is the result of an ethical way of thinking.

Leaving these considerations aside, I will principally argue in this paper that, in Late Antiquity, the definition of an anti-religion was inherent to the definition of religion. Greco-Roman writers called this anti-religion "magic" (*magia, mageia, goēteia*) and used it as a boundary-making concept which discriminated between good and bad religious behaviors. Conversely, it seems that paganism fitted the Christians' own "magical" anti-religion.[2] As Augustine heard while talking with apprentice theologians of Hippo, the "rites of old" no longer existed; "Paganism" (*i.e.* the culture of the peasant), was no longer the religion of the Empire, what superstitious Romans were doing now was "magic," or, in the words of Augustine's friends, "those things done in the night."[3]

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[1] *Ennead* 3.8.1. On Plotinus' "thoughts experiments" *cf.* SHAW (1999), p. 121, citing RAPPE, "Metaphor in Plotinus' Enneads v 8.9", *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995), p. 164-169; and RAPPE, "Self-knowledge and subjectivity in the *Enneads*", in L.P. GERSON (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 259-262.

[2] "Pagans" like Julian the Apostate rather called paganism "Hellenism," and traditional Romans, "Hellenes." Since both words basically mean the same thing—albeit denoting from which side of the fence the writer is—they will be used interchangeably in this paper.

[3] AUGUSTINE, *On the Divination of Daemons*, 5. Magic has a long history of association with night, literally and figuratively: *cf.* BENKO (1984), p. 125-127.

The study of magic as a boundary-making concept could be compared to what Foucault called "a history of limits."[4] In *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Foucault retraced the manner in which madness was slowly medicalized during the Enlightenment. He argued that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the European conception of mental illness was the rag-bag of the Enlightenment's misfits. Madness was taken care of, but their problems were not medicalized as with 21st century bio-medicine. Such institutions as "La Salpêtrière" and "l'Hôpital général," while caring for the sick and the poor, also served as prisons for those disillusioned by the positivist "new world order." Accordingly, among "real" madmen, sorcerers, alchemists and astrologers found their way into Paris' prison-hospitals.[5] For Foucault, the medicalization of impiety in general represented a precise moment in the evolution of social paradigms; a moment where magic gradually lost its credibility, stopped being blasphemous and started being a mental illness: "Tous ces signes [*i.e.* signs of magic] qui allaient devenir, à partir de la psychiatrie du XIXe siècle, les symptômes non équivoques de la maladie, sont restés, pendant près de deux siècles, partagés entre l'impiété et l'extravagance, à mi-chemin du profanatoire et du pathologique—là où la déraison prend ses dimensions propres."[6]

Thus, like magic in Late Antiquity, magic in eighteenth-century France was "extravagant" (*i.e.* false and delusive), as well as impious. For both periods, however, impiety and magic were shape-changing categories.[7] This, I argue, is the function of such categories. By being ill-defined, but nonetheless evil, magic could be manipulated by individuals to fit certain targets, like rivals, theories, or incomprehensible events. Magic was a protean category which incorporated incomprehensible—but nonetheless *evil*—things in the accuser's social space. In fact, magic rationalized the irrational by connoting the unknown with evil. Christians, for example, did not know more about pagan practices after they called them magic, but at least they could say that they were evil—and not *incomprehensible*. Similarly,

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[4] FOUCAULT (1973), cited by F. BRAUDEL, *Grammaire des Civilisations*, Flammarion, 1993, p. 63-64.

[5] FOUCAULT (1973), p. 130-134.

[6] FOUCAULT (1973), p. 133-134. The concept of magic now does not seem to have evolved beyond what Foucault described for the 18th century. "Magic" is no longer bad to practice because it is impious, it is bad because it is deceptive: "dégagée de ses pouvoirs sacrés, elle ne porte plus que des intentions maléfiques: une illusion de l'esprit au service des désordres du cœur. On ne la juge plus selon ses prestiges de profanation, mais d'après ce qu'elle révèle de déraison. " (p. 132). Examples of this modern attitude in regards to magic can be found in DE LIBERA (2003) and PAPAIS (2003).

Peter Brown used Mary Douglas' definition of magic to analyze the charge of magic in Late Antiquity.[8] For Brown, magic accusations occurred when a group with no socially-approved power (*inarticulate*) clashed with another established group, holding *articulate* power. He convincingly argued that the two social groups fought in *demi-mondes* (like the circus, the Emperor's court, or the church), where people of different cultural backgrounds met in a shared social space. These *demi-mondes* were social buffer-zones between rigid systems of "articulate power," where the norms of society (and nature) were suspended.[9] Peter Brown explained Late Antique magic accusations as the result of a "*malaise* in the structure of the governing classes of the Roman Empire."[10]: "Sorcery beliefs in the Later Empire, therefore, may be used like radio-active traces in a x-ray: where these assemble, we have a hint of pockets of uncertainty and competition in a society increasingly committed to a vested hierarchy in church and state."[11]

For the largest part of Late Antique society, which lived from the land, magic probably looked like what Jeanne Favret-Saada described for the late 1970s' Bocage, a rural region of Northern France. *L'encrouillage* (Bocage's slang for "bewitching") was a secret practice which drew on hatred and evil to explain *and* resolve unfortunate events. In the Bocage, magic explained crop failures, the illnesses of cattle, or the impotence of a family man.[12] In the Emperor's entourage, magic could be used to explain the incomprehensible (and undesirable) rise of a rival.[13] As we will see in this paper, in theology, magic fixed the boundary between orthodox and unorthodox cults by grouping together undesirable "religious evidence" which confronted one's cosmology. By "religious evidence," I

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[7] Gordon (1999, p.163) appropriately called his article "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic": "The notion of magic, at any rate in what I shall call a strong sense, was formed in the ancient world discontinuously and, as it were, with everybody talking at once."

[8] BROWN (1970), p. 25-26. *cf.* M. DOUGLAS, *De la souillure : essai sur les notions de pollution et de tabou*, translation of *Purity and Danger* by Anne Guérin, Éditions La Découverte, 1992, p.119-120 : "La sorcellerie serait la manifestation d'un pouvoir psychique antisocial émanant de personnes qui se situent dans les régions relativement non structurées de la société. Dans les cas où celle-ci peut difficilement exercer un contrôle sur ces individus, elle les accuse de sorcellerie, ce qui est une manière de les contrôler. Ce serait donc dans la non-structure que réside la sorcellerie. Les sorciers seraient l'équivalent social des coléoptères et des araignées que l'on trouve dans les interstices muraux et les boiseries. Ils inspirent les mêmes craintes et la même antipathie que les ambiguités et contradictions que l'on trouve dans d'autres structures de pensée; et les pouvoirs qu'on leur attribuent symbolisent leur statut ambigu et inarticulé."

[9] BROWN (1970), p. 21-22.

[10] BROWN (1970), p. 20.

[11] BROWN (1970), p. 25.

[12] FAVRET-SAADA (1977), p. 16-24.

understand the experiences of the divine which were taken for granted in Antiquity. For example, oracular sayings were meaningful data for most Romans, even if they sometimes could not understand what they meant. Likewise, people now take Einstein's theory of relativity for granted, even if they generally cannot explain *why* they think it is "true." In a similar way, sacrifices and prayers were religious evidence as well because they were seen as holding truth or special powers on the world. Being the source of all knowledge and all power, Late Antique intellectuals and politicians vied for the control of religious evidence—*i.e.* to impose a cultural system on society which included "good" evidence, and excluded "bad" evidence.

By being an ethical category, it will also appear that magic was a political category. The validity of this statement, however, depends on what one defines as being "politics" and "culture." In this study, I understand politics as being the protection *and* the advertisement of one's ideal culture. Moreover, I understand culture as the *shifting* extension of one's identity, which stops where one arbitrarily considers that something alien begins. Thus, if, as for most inhabitants of the Roman Empire, religion was a crucial aspect of culture, an attempt to distinguish the good and the bad in religion became a highly political gesture.

The political aspect of magic accusation will be explored in a case study involving two Neoplatonists of the late third and early fourth century AD, Porphyry of Tyre and Iamblichus of Chalcis. Drawing on the thesis that magic definition and accusation was not only theological but also political, I will argue that Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* was a tool for the restructuring of the Roman Empire. Originally called Malchos, the first Neoplatonist studied here was nicknamed "Porphyry" by his fellow philosophers.[14] He was a prominent student of Plotinus, the "founder" of Neoplatonism.[15] Probably after having met an Egyptian priest called Anebo, Porphyry sent him a letter on religious issues, now entitled *The Letter to Anebo.* The Neoplatonist Iamblichus, under the guise of an Egyptian high priest named Abammon,

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[13] On the accusation of magic leveled against Athanasius, *cf.* AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, 15.7.7, cited by BROWN (1970), p. 26. On the example of Libanius, *cf.* BROWN (1970), p. 24, n. 32.

[14] Porphyry (232–305 AD) gave up his Syrian name of Malchos ("king" in Syriac), while Iamblichus (240-325 AD) only transliterated his (Syriac or Aramaic "yamliku": "may he rule", or "he is *king:* CLARKE [2003], p. xix). It is tempting to relate these two different attitudes to Iamblichus and Porphyry's dissention on the semantics of holy words, *cf.* IAMBLICHUS, *De Mysteriis*, 8.4-5. (hereafter DM).

[15] "Neoplatonism" is a modern category. It is worth noting, however, that the change in Greek philosophy that scholars witnessed with Plotinus (205–270 AD) was also observed by Proclus (412–485 AD), who, in contrast with modern scholars, did not see "Neoplatonism" as something new but as the return to the true philosophy of Plato (*Platonic Theology*, 1.1).

subsequently answered this letter. Drawing on his Egyptian lore, "Abammon" resolved the problems presented in Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, in a letter now called the *De Mysteriis*. Both Iamblichus and Porphyry came from native Syrian families, and although Iamblichus studied under Porphyry, they were roughly about the same age. [16] Unfortunately, the epistolary exchange is impossible to date accurately.[17] Both letters, however, addressed issues of divination and theology which were relevant to the late third century AD; a period where more and more Christian statesmen and intellectuals began to criticize the religious procedures of the Empire.

In the *Letter to Anebo*, Porphyry confronted cultic practices with logical or philosophical beliefs. What appears from Porphyry's fragmentary and sometimes contradictory works is that he did not put faith in *material* rites but preferred an intellectual religion.[18] Iamblichus' position in the *De Mysteriis*, however, turned Porphyry's position

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[16] DILLON (1974), p. 866. *cf.* p. 863-875 for the best biography of Iamblichus.

[17] Blumenthal, Clark and Dillon give the DM a composition date between 280 and 350 AD (CLARKE 2003, p. xxvii); Saffrey, 300 AD (1971, p. 231-233). Dillon, however, suggested an early compostion (1973, p. 13 and 18), but later noted that he now disagreed with his tentative chronology (1974, p. 875). We cannot assume that the DM was written during Porphyry's lifetime because it was a response to Porphyry's letter. Many published texts in Antiquity took the form of a letter, or a note, but that does not mean that the audience was restricted to the addressee. In philosophy, ethical treatises were often written in that genre. Aristotle's *Ethics to Nichomachus* and Epicurus' *Letters* are early examples. The *Letter to Marcella* and the *De Abstinentia*, two of Porphyry's most polemical works, were letters as well. Augustine's *City of God* was also presented as a letter, and is probably the best example of a work combining religious, ethical and political issues. If a study of the genre cannot date the exchange, neither is the content of the DM of any help. Carine Van Liefferinge (with Larsen: VAN LIEFFERINGE [1999], p. 33, n. 86) is inclined to date it toward the end of Iamblichus' career on the basis that it could show an evolution from an "earlier" and more intellectual conception of divinization found in his *protreptikon* to Pythagorean philosophy. As the refutation of Joseph Bidez' chronology of Porphyry's works will shortly demonstrate, we cannot date Neoplatonic treatises based on their religious character. We cannot assume that Porphyry's or Iamblichus' shifted from a religious and "irrational" philosophy to a more "rational" one; nor can we consider the reverse process a more convincing alternative.

[18] Due to Porphyry's somewhat inconsistent way of writing, this is still debatable. As Shaw (1995; p. 10-16), Finnamore (1999; p. 87), and Berchman (1989; p. 147) realized, the issue of whether rites are useful or not for the soul's unification with the One depends on the philosophers' psychology. If they conceived soul completely descended into matter, then *external* and material rites were necessary for its salvation. But, if as Plotinus thought, the soul was undescended, the soul could short-circuit the material world in its "return" to the One. This revolutionary psychology, which, I argue was also Porphyry's, claimed that salvation was achieved by a withdrawal of the self to the highest part of the soul, which was still in contact with the divine. Conversely, since the lower "spiritual" part of the soul (which *is* descended) could only perceive the material world, material rites could not bring salvation. It is still debated whether Porphyry considered the soul undescended or not. Citing the exact same passage, Smith (1974; p. 40-45) argued that Porphyry held Plotinus' theory of the undescended soul, while Berchman (1989; p. 147, n. 297-301; citing STEEL [1978], p. 38, n. 1), wrote that Porphyry sadly dismissed Plotinus' surprising theory. Berchman interpreted Porphyry's statement that "who has *deviated* from Intellect is in the very place where he turned aside" (*De Abstinentia* **1.39.2**.115.9*ff*: *Nou de ho parkbas ekei estin hopou kai parexelthen*), as meaning that part of the soul "does not enjoy perpetual intellection and passivity." That the soul is not perpetually united with Intellect or the One is a fact for Plotinus (*Enneads*, 4.8.7.1-15), and did not stopped him thinking that the soul was undescended.

upside-down by arguing that the intellect alone could not bring one's soul united with the divine—the famous "assimilation with the divine" which will be considered shortly. Iamblichus rationalized cultic practices by rallying all good religious evidence under one system, which he called "theurgy."[19] In short, the religious debate between these two eminent philosophers revolved around a political question: what should, and what should not be considered religious evidence.

Part 1 will explore Porphyry's position on cult practices. I argue that Porphyry's Plotinian stance, notably upheld in *the Philosophy from Oracles*, forced him to downplay the differences between civic cults and magic. Since it theoretically negated differences between "magic" and religion, I call this approach "non-dichotomous."[20] I will argue furthermore that Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* can be seen as a reaction to the absence of dichotomy in Porphyry's considerations on religious practice.

In part 2, I demonstrate how Iamblichus sought to control religious evidence and reacted to Porphyry's non-dichotomous stance by thoroughly eradicating statements bringing rituals too close to magic. By separating religious evidence from anti-religious evidence, *i.e.* magic, Iamblichus' enterprise must be understood as an attempt to define and appropriate the theological battleground on which a growing Christian counter-culture opposed the Greco-Roman establishment. By vying for the control of religious evidence, the political and religious aspects of the *De Mysteriis* cannot be separated. Indeed, if politics is the protection and the advertisement of one's ideal community, and if religious evidence is a

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Contrary to what Berchman concluded from his quote of *De Abstientia*, Porphyry's preceding sentence ("The Intellect is with itself, even when we are not with it": *Nous men gar esti pros hautôi, kan estin hèmeis mè ômen pros autôi*) rather implies that we *can* be with the Intellect—not that we are shut off from it. As Gillian Clark remarked in her translation of *De Abstinentia* (2000; n. 138), this last statement probably points to the theory of the undescended soul (*Enneads*, 4.8.8). "Undescended" vs. "descended" is probably not a good way to contrast the two positions because both Iamblichus and Plotinus thought that the soul was the mediator between the divine and the non-divine (*Enneads*, 4.8.7.6-7; DM **4.2-3**.184.1-13; DM **6.5**.246.16-**6.6**.247.5). It might be encouraging to point out that scholars in Antiquity also had difficulties with Porphyry's works. Augustine and Eusebius were not the only one who remarked Porphyry's ambiguity, Iamblichus did too. In *De Anima*, he wrote that Porphyry seemed to be in doubt about Plotinus and Numenius' conception of the soul, but that he sometimes "follow[ed] it completely as having been handed down from on high." (*in* STOBAEUS, *Anthology*, 1. p. 365.7-21.) Throughout this paper, I argue that Porphyry was reluctant to differentiate magic from civic rituals because he thought that the soul's return to the One could not be effected through matter.

[19] Iamblichus' letter was originally called *Reply of the Master Abamon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo, and the Solutions to the Questions it Contains.* Fortunately, scholars now call this work *De Mysteriis*, *cf.* SAFFREY (1993), p. 144-145. For a complete assessment of the *De Mysteriis* textual history, *cf.* SICHERL (1957).

crucial aspect of this community, choosing what will and what will not be religious evidence is highly political. Thus, by using magic as a category to separate true and false religious evidence, Iamblichus not only vigorously debated over theology, but he also advertised his own ideal culture. Trustworthy religious evidence was crucial for the Late Antique emperors and warlords who wanted to rule as "friends of the divine"—*comes dei*. Since religious evidence had a political weight in Late Antiquity, the *De Mysteriis* was political because it created a coherent system in which certain evidence was discredited (magic), while other was authenticated (religion)—whether Christians were, or were not related to this debate.

For all of Antiquity's philosophical systems, the greatest goal was to reach *homoiosis theiou*—the assimilation to the divine, or divinization of the soul.[21] For philosophers, whom we tend to regard as apathetic professional scholars, the assimilation with the divine was not only something to think about, it was more importantly something to live for. Despite its emphasis on metaphysics, neoplatonism was not an exception to this ideal. As we will see, this feature of Late Antique philosophy brought the *De Mysteriis* in the realm of politics. For Iamblichus, theurgy (his word for *homoiosis theiou*, or, in layman terms, "religion")[22] assimilated the soul to the demiurge. Then, as a demiurge, the theurgist's soul was filled with the principles of creation and was thus not only capable, but compelled to engage in political activity.

Since magic plays an important role throughout the thesis, it is important first to address some interpretative problems, and secondly, to demonstrate how Neoplatonists understood magic first as a mechanical, "sympathetic" procedure, and secondly as a delusive and impious belief.

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[20] This position, however, was never explicitly stated by either Plotinus and Porphyry, who also used magic to discredit other religions *cf.* Plotinus' *Ennead* 2.9 against the Gnostics, and Porphyry *Against the Christians*, *in* Jerome (PL t. 26, col. 1066d).

[21] O'MEARA (2003), p. 31-39. This concept was expressed in many different ways during Antiquity. Throughout the paper, the following expressions will be used with the same meaning: assimilation with the divine (*homoiosis theiou*); divinization of the soul/self; unification with the One (*enōsis*); return of the soul; theurgy; road to happiness.

[22] O'MEARA (2003), p. 128-131; VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 25-38. *cf.* DM 10.

Magic and Neoplatonism

Goēteia and magic

The Greek terms *goēteia* and *magia*, translated as "magic," seems to have been used to accuse somebody else, the sorcerer (*goēs*, *magos*) of practicing a mysterious—and impious—art.[23] Being a *goēs*, then, was not like being a carpenter or a consul, two businesses that were socially marked by strict characteristics. We should thus be cautious of the actual words used in sources to describe activities that we think are magic. Calling the *Greek Magical Papyri* "magic" (even if its content almost never refers to itself as such) is a bit like calling Michel Foucault or Eric Dodds's works "demagogy", and not what they claim to be. The difference between demagogues and historians is not *how* they accomplish their work; for historians and (good) demagogues both use logical argumentation. Likewise, holy men and sorcerers in Antiquity also shared similar techniques and thus cannot be differentiated by the way they accomplished their miracles. In the early 20th century, Frazer considered magic different from religion because it was mechanical and aimed toward material interests; it was not religion but science's "bastard sister."[24] Many critiques have shown, however, that Frazer's characteristics (sympathy, god-coercion and material interests) could not establish an *absolute* definition of magic because they were often present in official religion too.[25] What can be more easily done, however, is a *relative* definition of magic. In fact, by its secretive nature, magic forces us to look at it from contradicting points of view.

In his study of the *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM),[26] Hans Dieter Betz realized that the writers of the so-called "magical" papyri referred to themselves with the vocabulary of the

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[23] PLATO, *Laws*, 10.909b; PLATO, *Meno*, 80b; GORGIAS, *Éloge d'Hélène*, frag. B11.10 (DIELZ-KRANZ); GORGIAS, frag. A3 (DIELS-KRANZ) = DIOGENES LAERTIUS, 8.56; *On the sacred disease*, 1.10-12; PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 2.9.14; AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 10.9, *etc. cf.* BRAARVIG (1999), p. 31-51 and GRAF (1994), p. 35-37.

[24] J.G. FRAZER, (1981), p.14.

[25] BRAARVIG (1999), p. 21-31.

[26] The *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, were first collected, edited and translated by Karl Preisendanz in 1928. In the 1986 edition, Hans Dieter Betz added new Greek material (PGM 82-130) as well as bilingual (Demotic/Greek) papyri not included by Preisendanz. The PGM are hardly datable and range from the first century to the seventh century AD. Still, if they were read as "sheet music" for religious performances, we can assume that, in essence, their format did not change a lot over the ages. Thus, even if they were written down under the Roman Empire, they probably reflect older traditions. *cf.* BRASHEAR (1996) for a good history of the transmission and editions of the PGM.

mysteries—and not of magic.[27] Accordingly, Betz judged that the authors of the PGM rituals considered their work to be "religion", and not "magic."[28] Moreover, Betz noted that the PGM never refers to practitioners as *goēs*, and only rarely as *magos*.[29] On the contrary, the practitioner was an "initiate";[30] Pnouthis, a famous Egyptian "sorcerer," was a "holy scribe."[31] Nevertheless, Betz tended to "magicalize" the texts. For example, he called the rituals' authors "mystagogue-magicians" and rendered *ousia* (a very vague term denoting the materials used in the rites) as "magical material."[32] Although Preizandanz' edition of the eighty-odd "magical" papyri probably contains some secret rituals which were commonly considered to be magic by Greek speakers,[33] many of the PGM's "holy scribes," however, would probably have been insulted if someone had called their rituals "magic." The PGM are a modern collection, which includes many descriptions of ritual under the *modern* label of "magic."[34] Accordingly, the definition of these papyri is probably worth reconsidering.

Magic is not an easy category, and it is clear that, as with other social taboos like adultery, people rarely described themselves as practicing it. Given the mostly public character of the texts copied down from Antiquity until now, it is not surprising that few would have seriously defined themselves as socially deviant individuals. When the term magic is used, then, it invariably occurs in negative, second-party accounts. In the face of such a context, two options are conceivable: 1-Studying the *social processes* surrounding the accusation of magic—*i.e.* who accused, and how—which is very different from: 2-Studying sources describing the *practice* of what other people called "magic." This study deals with the first kind of methodology. For some, the definition of magic is a futile endeavor.[35] This might be true if one only considers the second type of magic study, *i.e.* the classification of

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[27] According to Betz (1991; p. 248), in the PGM, "Holy magic (*hiera mageia*) is a positive term. [...] There are, however, different levels of cultural sophistication in the papyri, and it is in sections representing a higher cultural level that we find descriptive terms such as *mageia* (magic), *magikos* (magical), and *magos* (magician)." One could wonder what Betz means by a "higher cultural level" (which probably means a *Greek* cultural milieu). Nevertheless, *mageia* and its cognate terms could be understood in Greco-Roman literature as meaning the purest religion as well as its diametrical opposite, *goēteia*. *cf.* PLATO, *Alcibiades*, 1.121e, and Apuleius (*Apology*, 25-26), who cites Plato's passage to his own profit.

[28] BETZ (1991), p. 254.

[29] BETZ (1991), p. 248.

[30] *mustēs* : PGM 1.127; 4.474, 744.

[31] *hierogrammateōs* : PGM 1.42.

[32] PGM, p. 336.

[33] Some of the rituals found in the PGM either involves the coercion/persuasion of divinities or the restraining of humans, *cf.* PGM 4.555-582; 7.394-404, 417-22, 429-58, *etc.*

[34] *cf.* BETZ (1996), p. xli-xliv.

sources (like the PGM) or literary descriptions of magical procedures. For this study, however, defining magic is essential because philosophers and bishops repeatedly appropriated its meaning to fit their own cosmology and their political visions.

If we consider magic as the foil of religion, defining what magic was for Neoplatonists will be of great help in understanding Neoplatonic religiosity. It appears that, following Plotinus' path, Porphyry did not consider relevant to separate religious practices under "magic" and "religion." Since Plotinus did not consider the use of matter applicable to the divinization of self, distinguishing between evil and profitable religious *practices* was not even a problem for him. I argue that, following Plotinus, Porphyry also considered part of the soul as still undescended, meaning that the soul was still divine, and that the divinization of self consisted in realizing this.[36] For Iamblichus, however, since the soul was descended, external—and material—help was necessary for its return. Like Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* was an attempt to define true ritual activity. It seems that for Porphyry and Iamblichus, the identification of this activity could not be accomplished without referring, even implicitly, to an antithetical activity. Put simply, if the Neoplatonists' goal was to find "the one road to happiness *for all*" (*i.e.* an Empire-wide religious system), it seems that it could only be found by positing a system in diametrical opposition with religion and by discriminating it.[37]

Plotinus and magic

Neoplatonists had two different attitudes toward magic (*goêteia*, *mageia*), both of which can be traced back to Plato:

1. Magic was a group of rituals, which claimed coercive power over divinities. Neoplatonists understood such a claim to be impious, but explained its potential truthfulness by a pervasive world-view (in philosophy as elsewhere), which saw the world as an intricate web of microcosms and macrocosms physically related by an

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[35] OGDEN (1999), p. 85-86 and GAGER (1992), p. 12.

[36] *cf.* note 18.

[37] Porphyry (302F [SMITH] = AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 10.32), said that he never found the road to happiness for all, which implies that he was at least thinking about it. As will see further on, O'Meara's study of Neoplatonic political theory makes evident that Iamblichus tried with the *De Mysteriis* to find this road.

invisible power called sympathy (*sumpatheia*). This theory explained invisible relations of attractions or repulsion, and seemingly incredible events.[38]

2. Magic was delusive. It was a metaphor for the "ensnarement" of the world over the soul, *i.e.* the fact that souls forget their true divinity and fall prey to irrational impulses.[39]

Using what Armstrong called a philosophical commonplace, Plotinus remarked that nobody tried to understand the true and complex workings of fire because everybody was used to it. If somebody did, however, people would be astonished by the detailed account of this "ordinary thing."[40] Plotinus' discussion of the influence of stars, and ultimately, of magic, is part of a great work subdivided in three treatises, *On Difficulties about the Soul I, II,* and *III* (*Enneads* 4.3-5). In this context, Plotinus tried to solve the problem of the relation between the embodied condition of the individual soul, and paradoxically, of our soul's participation in—and not subordination to—the world-soul.[41] The *Ennead* 4.4. starts in the middle of a discussion on memory, and shows that stars, gods and perfect entities cannot have memory because they need nothing and learn nothing which was not part of their knowledge before.[42] Knowing everything, and *for ever*, makes memory useless for the gods, who will then, "not even have designs and devices concerned with human affairs, by which they will manage our business and that of the earth in general: the right order which comes from them to the All," Plotinus said, "is of another kind." [43] Plotinus meant that the gods' influence could not be understood in a historical and locative way, but in a spatially as well as temporally unified way.

Probably drawing on Plato's passage of the *Banquet* on the powers of Eros,[44] Plotinus subscribed to a naturalistic conception of the universe in which all—*i.e.* good and evil—activities could be explained according to the powers of cosmic sympathy (*sympatheia*), a

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[38] This principle was explained by PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.30-45. A similar view can be seen in the fragments of Celsus' *True Discourse* as found in ORIGEN, *Against Celsus*, 4.86. Origen himself seem to had a simliar conception of magic (*Against Celsus,* 1.24-25). For the quantum physics' spin on the same idea, *cf.* Caltech Media Relation: *Caltech physicists achieve first bona fide quantum teleportation* @ http://pr.caltech.edu/media/Press_Releases/PR11935.html.

[39] *cf.* PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 2.9.14-15; 4.3.17; PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia*, 1.28; 1.43; 2.41; DM **3.25**.160.15.

[40] PLOTINUS, *Enneads,* 4.4.37.

[41] ARMSTRONG, *Plotinus with an English Translation,* vol.4, Harvard University Press, p. 27.

[42] PLOTINUS, *Enneads,* 4.4.6.

[43] PLOTINUS, *Enneads,* 4.4.6.

[44] PLATO, *Banquet,* 202e, which itself is a further elaboration of the old principle of Love and Strife (*philia* and *neikos*), mentioned by Empedocles, frag. 17.19-20b (DIELS-KRANZ).

> harmony of action and experience and an order which arranged things together, adapting them and bringing them into due relation with each other, so that according to every figure of the heavenly circuit there is a different disposition of the things which it governs, as if they were performing a single ballet in a rich variety of dance-movements [...] But the parts of the dancer's body, too, cannot possibly keep the same position in every figure: as his body follows the pattern of the dance and bends with it, one of his limbs is pressed hard down, another relaxed, one works hard and painfully, another is given rest as the figuring changes.[45]

Magic, for Plotinus, *was* the cosmic dance.[46] Moreover, Plotinus described the "Love and Strife" of the All, *i.e.* cosmic sympathy, as the "first wizard and apothecary."[47] This suggests that he was using magic (*goēteia*) to show that practical activity should not be considered as good in itself but only reflecting a higher Good.[48] Practical activity, then *was* magic: "For everything which is directed to something else is enchanted (*goēteuetai*) by something else; for that to which it is directed enchants (*goēteuei*) and draws it; but only that which is self-directed is free from enchantment (*agoēteuton*)." That Plotinus used magic as a metaphor for the "ensnarement of the world" becomes very clear when he finishes his explanation of *goēteia* by writing that the practical man is drawn not by individual wizards, but by nature as a whole.[49]

Plotinus' conception of magic is fairly original and, pushed to its farthest extent, could even be considered impious. Indeed, if any external action becomes magic, why would one continue to practice religion? And, on a more political tone, why one would sacrifice to the emperor or the community if civic religion is a hoax? Plotinus probably did not want to finish as Socrates had, and he finished his excursus on magic with a discreet rehabilitation of traditional piety: As Plotinus was ready to acknowledge, some involvement in the world—and some enchantment—was essential for the survival of individuals and communities.[50]

This is the conception of magic usually espoused by Plotinus.[51] The only exception to this rather exceptional view occurs in *Ennead* 2.9., *Against the Gnostics*, where he accused Gnostics of practicing magic. It is interesting to note that, contrary to *Ennead* 4.4., where only *goēteia* was used, he used here *mageia* and *goēteia* interchangeably, which implies that both

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[45] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.33.3-8; 12-17.
[46] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.40.
[47] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.40.5-8 : *kai hē alēthinē mageia kai hē en tōi panti philia kai to neikos au. Goēs ho prōtos kai pharmakeus houtos estin.*
[48] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.44-45.
[49] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.43.
[50] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.44.17-25.
[51] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 2.3.15.14; 4.4.40-43; 4.3.17; 4.9.3 5.1.2.13.

words held the same pejorative meaning. According to Plotinus, these Gnostics claimed that they could dominate higher powers by magic (*goēteias*), soothing actions (*thelxeis*) and persuasive actions (*peiseis*). Plotinus considered the Gnostics' rituals to be magic because, by professing that they manipulated gods, they fooled people by giving "an appearance of majesty to their own words."[52] This is also why he thought that these Gnostics were wrong when they said that they could remove illnesses by casting away the daemons that caused it; for Plotinus, the problem was not that daemons could be manipulated,[53] the problem was that illnesses came from an imbalance in the four humors, according to the official Greek medicine. It appears that this passage does not contradict *Ennead* 4.4. Plotinus called the Gnostics' practices *mageia* or *goēteia* because they were the worst aspect of the *goēteia* he had described earlier: they were the enchantment of the world, this "something else which comes about"[54] when the parts of the world move according to the cosmic dance and humans, so to speak, cherish not the beauty of the dance, but the limbs of the dancer.[55] The magic of the Gnostics was like the magic of the sophists' art according to Plato: it was not dangerous because it was inherently powerful; it was dangerous because it was deceptive.[56]

As we will see in part 2, Iamblichus' heavy emphasis on the supernatural quality of theurgy was a direct response to accusations of magic leveled against rituals. In Porphyry's letter, such accusations either reduced cults to a manipulation of cosmic sympathy, or condemned their delusive power. In fact, for Iamblichus, these remained the two types of magic. Accordingly, the *De Mysteriis*' "image-creating technique" could only be magical delusion when compared with the divine illumination brought by the gods through theurgy.

The "image-creating technique" can also be found in Plato's *Sophist*. In this text, Plato associated the sophists' demagogy with magic.[57] For Xavier Papaïs, Plato used the analogy of magic for two reasons. First, he wanted to oppose the sophist to the sage by claiming that the former was a forger, an "imitator," and the latter, a searcher of truth. Secondly, by this polarization, Plato implied the existence of non-being, a dark space where

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[52] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 2.9.14.
[53] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.43.12.
[54] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.39.
[55] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 4.4.44.
[56] PLATO, *Laws*, 10.909b.
[57] The *Republic* (599a) shows a similar attitude to magic and was used to discredit poets who claimed false things about the gods.

the philosopher could relegate all the "puissances du faux."[58] According to Papaïs, affirming the existence of non-being was a definitive break from Parmenides' ontology, and was necessary if one wanted to classify the sophists in a distinct category:

> Pour que la raison philosophique puisse juger les sophistes et les mages, les rendre discernables et s'en dissocier à son tour, il faut alors postuler une certaine existence du non-être : supposer, avec Parménide, une plénitude de l'être, c'est rendre indiscernables raison et magie, vérité et illusion.

According to Papaïs' analysis of Plato's *Sophist*, magic could be used to stigmatize the irrational and absurd as "non-being." In other words, any apparently unclassified and absurd event could be categorized as magic.

This, however, introduces another question: if Plato created the category of "non-being" to find a suitable place for sophists, why did he also include magic in this group? The answer can be found in the political vision of the *Laws*, where the image of the sorcerer and the sophist seems to coincide. For Plato, the sorcerer's demagogy and disrespectful attitude toward the other citizens forced the legislators to send them to the prison. But Plato's condemnation of the sorcerer did not end at incarceration. Because he claimed to be able to manipulate divinities, the gods also excluded him from their "city." Being a living pollution, the sorcerer's dead body had to be thrown out of the limits of the city—without any sepulture—and whoever was found caring for his remains had to be prosecuted.[59] The sorcerer was the ultimate outcast; for his demagogy, he was rejected from the human polity, and for his impiety, he was rejected from the divine polity as well. The comparison of the *Laws* and the *Sophist* suggests that "sophist" and "sorcerer" were closely related terms for Plato. Calling sophists "sorcerers," however, did more than cast their teachings in the realm of "non-being." Because magic was considered evil,[60] Plato's accusation that sophists were sorcerers shows that magic was not only vilifying demagogical discourses; it was vilifying *beings* as well.[61] As such, Plato's dealings with the sophists and the sorcerers can be seen as a "dress-rehearsal" for Porphyry and Iamblichus' exchange. For Plato, as well as for Neoplatonists seven centuries later, magic was a powerful political weapon.

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[58] PAPAÏS, (2003), p. 415-416.

[59] *Laws*, 10.10909b. On the political function of religion, *cf.* O'MEARA (2003), p. 116-119.

[60] *cf.* GRAF (1994), p. 31-38.

[61] A passage of the *Meno* shows that Greek cities often got rid of undesirable political character (like Socrates) through accusations of magic: PLATO, *Meno*, 80b.

Dichotomous and non-dichotomous approaches to religion

Along these two ethically loaded descriptions of magic and sorcerers, Plato also described magic in a very different context. In the *Banquet*, Eros is presented as supervising interactions between the human and the divine spheres. He controlled what we now would call the supernatural as well as the spiritual experiences of the divine: "the art of the priests for what concerns the sacrifices and the initiations, likewise for the incantations, the prophecies in general and magic (*goēteia*)."[62] It seems, then, that the *Banquet* had no qualms associating magic with socially acceptable cults. According to what Plato wrote in his other dialogues, we should not assume that the inclusion of magic in the realm of divine communications implied that magic was politically correct. In *On the Difficulties about the Soul II*, however, Plotinus' definition of magic also seems to entail this apolitical conclusion—or at least, theoretically. Indeed, as we just saw, if "only what is self-directed is free from enchantment," any material offering would have to be grouped with magic. Throughout this study, this is what I will call the non-dichotomous stance. In a nutshell, it was a *theoretical* position, awkwardly poised between an elitist philosophical religiosity and a popular experience of the divine. This is not to say that the non-dichotomous stance was uncritical toward what seemed to be bad religion. Instead of considering the opposition of magic and religion, the non-dichotomous approach rather separated the experiences of the divine in two groups: the *contemplation* of the divine and the *performance* of the divine. In other words, proponents of this position did not see religion as opposed to magic, but rather saw "philosophy" as completely superior and separate from cultic practices *and* magic. For the "non-dichotomist," in regard to the soul's salvation, there is no differentiation needed between magic and religion simply because both practices cannot bring in any way to a unification of soul with the One. This is a theoretical position that can be deduced from what Plotinus and Porphyry had to say about the natural world and religious attitudes. These two Neoplatonists, however, were very cautious when criticizing popular religion because they were probably afraid that a radical application of their philosophy would have alienated them from the Roman polity. As will be shown in part 1.b, Porphyry subscribed to the non-dichotomous position, but nonetheless pointed out bad religion, *i.e.* material cults. In reaction to this position, which rejected the performance of the divine, Iamblichus tried to

save material cults by systematically differentiating magic from religion; this is what I call the dichotomous position.

This is not to say that these two positions were not completely different, since both Porphyry and Iamblichus thought that existed good and bad religious behaviors. In this respect, it is important to understand the discrepancies that can appear between theoretical positions and their application. The distinction between the dichotomous and the non-dichotomous lies more in Iamblichus' new theoretical grounds than in their application regarding piety. Since Plotinus considered soul as more "undescended" than separated from its divine origin, the "return of the soul" was not something that had to be performed since it was already actualized; one just had to remind himself of his divine origins. On the contrary, for Iamblichus, the soul was not "undescended," it was "upside-down," *i.e.* relegated to the world of matter and cut off from its divine origin. In sum, the psychology of Iamblichus was a conservative attempt to steer philosophy back in the tracks laid down by Plato, and away from Plotinus.[63]

The following and first section of the study will show that Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*—and, to a greater degree, Iamblichus' response—closely followed the limits of magic in order to define what was thought to be the true religion. In that sense, their endeavors are evidence supporting the hypothesis of this work: that the definition of an anti-religion is inherent to the definition of religion (and, in a larger extent, identity), and, moreover, that magic was used in the Greco-Roman world as the antithesis of religion.

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[62] PLATO, *Banquet*, 202e.

[63] This is Shaw's major thesis. *cf.* SHAW (1995), p. 10-17. See also John Finamore's (1999, p. 87-88) fascinating article that compares the magic of Plotinus with the theurgy of Iamblichus. As is argued in this paper, he showed that Iamblichus' theurgy was a reaction to the place Plotinus accorded to magic in his cosmology. If, as Shaw wrote, the *Enneads*' unintended consequence was a desacralization of the cosmos, the *De Mysteriis*' unintended consequence was probably the definitive separation of the creative principle of the universe *from* the universe

l'injuste, lui, est impie envers Dieu et ses pères, inique envers les autres hommes. Par suite, sacrifierait-il des hécatombes, ornerait-il les temples de milliers d'offrandes, c'est un impie, un athée, d'intention un sacrilège.
PORPHYRY, *Letter to Marcella*, 14.18

1.a

Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*: Platonic piety meets traditional piety

Reading Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* through the extent fragments can be very deceptive. In fact, our sources, Augustine, Eusebius, and Iamblichus all provide a misleading idea of the letter's original tone.[64] For the Christian apologists, Porphyry was a formidable adversary and required a cunning refutation. Porphyry's beliefs sometimes came uncomfortably close to Christian ones and, as we can see in Augustine's *City of God*, apologists emphasized apparent discrepancies in Porphyry's works to achieve their polemical goals.[65] Like Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, his treatise *On Abstinence* was very critical of pagan worship and it is not surprising that Christian apologists used them both as a foil for his other works. But what Christians then and some modern scholars now have misunderstood is that, like Eusebius, Porphyry often quoted large portion of other works, without necessarily agreeing with them. As Andrew Smith appropriately coined the term, he was taking the detached stance of a "man of contradiction."[66]

Not surprisingly, Christian apologists exploited Porphyry's non-dichotomous approach to religious cults. Eusebius, for example, only cited Porphyry when it suited him, *i.e.* when Porphyry cited or presented religious evidence similar to magic. Augustine had a different approach. He seemed to have been fairly faithful to Porphyry's thoughts, but he

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[64] The other sources for extant fragments are Theodoret (*Graec. affect. curat.*, 1.48; 3.66-8), Josephus (*Memorialis libellus*, 144.29-41) and Cyril (*Against Julian*, 4.125). These can be put aside since they only repeat what can be found in Eusebius, Augustine and Iamblichus. *cf.* SODANO (1958), p. xli.

[65] *e.g.* Eusebius' comparison of the *Letter to Anebo* (EUSEBIUS, *Preparation Evangelica* [hereafter PE], 5.10) with *The Philosophy from Oracles* (EUSEBIUS, PE, 5.11); Augustine's comparison between the *Letter* (*City of God*, 10.11) and an unidentified work (*City of God*, 10.8-10).

also focused on certain aspects, like for example, theurgy in his paraphrase of the *Letter to Anebo*, which was apparently not Porphyry's main topic. In the *De Mysteriis*, our other source, Iamblichus was not concerned with the same apologetic rhetoric. Nevertheless he seems to have constantly downplayed Porphyry's own solutions to put his own opinions in a better light.

In section 1, I propose to read the fragments of the letter closely in order to demonstrate two points: section 1.a will illustrate that the broadness of Porphyry's questions was patently misrepresented by the apologists in order to demonstrate that paganism was magic. Notwithstanding the apologists' biases, we can still see that Porphyry gave a lot of attention to the problem of the gods' passivity or impassivity. By insisting on this problem, I argue that Porphyry was pointing to a magical aspect that he found in civic rites. Section 1.b will show that Porphyry's non-dichotomous stance, poised between religious and philosophical assumptions, forced him to neglect the differences between religious orthodoxy and magic. At the same time, this approach suggests that Porphyry's concern was to stimulate a philosophical rationalization of cult practices, not to change social institutions—in other words, to bend philosophy to religious evidence, and not vice-versa. Accordingly, all of the letter's critiques strove to draw the boundaries of good and bad religion by following the contour lines of magic. As we will see, Porphyry, Eusebius, Augustine and Iamblichus articulated their treatises around the problem of god-coercing rituals, a clear characteristic of magic. Ultimately, I will argue that, even if Iamblichus left no clear trace of the influence of Christians on the writing of his response, the sole presence of an enterprise trying to organize cult—and more importantly, of the definition and rejection of magic—is a testimony of ongoing cultural clashes.[67]

The precise dating of both the *Letter to Anebo* and its response, the *De Mysteriis*, is impossible due to the lack of internal evidence. Nevertheless, in the early 20th century Joseph Bidez tried to establish a chronology of Porphyry's works based on their attitude toward paganism. A complete review of the literature against this interpretation would be useless here.[68] A refutation of Bidez's assumptions, however, will not only show why his method

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[66] SMITH (1974), p. xvii.
[67] *cf.* BROWN (1970), p. 15.
[68] Smith's (2001) article is the most persuasive.

could not work, but will also introduce the problem of "rationalism," which has plagued the study of Neoplatonism for years.

According to Bidez, the *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On the Divine Images* presented an oriental mind-frame and were written before Porphyry was influenced by Plotinus' school in Rome. Conversely, the *Letter to Anebo*, *On Abstinence* and *The Return of the Soul* were probably composed in Porphyry's later years since they showed no more traces of the "daemonic nightmare that obsessed the *Philosophy from Oracles*."[69] Following the popular opposition between Greek/Rationality and Oriental/Irrationality,[70] Bidez thought that Porphyry achieved his metamorphosis into a fully-fledged Greek philosopher when he wrote his interpretation of Aristotle's *Organon*.[71] From Bidez's standpoint, since a belief in supernatural or daemonic forces was opposed to logical reasoning and traditional Greek philosophy, he could only understand Porphyry's more religiously inclined works as having been written before Plotinus influenced Porphyry.

Recently, the familiar dichotomy between rationality and irrationality along ethnic boundaries has received its fair share of criticism, and, for better or worse, is no longer considered enlightening. Notwithstanding Eusebius' agenda and its heavy imprint on the few fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, Porphyry's exposition of paradoxes between philosophy and religious evidence reflects an interest in solving contradictions—not a rigid mind incapable of sustaining paradoxes.

As we will further see in part 1.b, Plotinus and Porphyry manifested a great respect for religious evidence. Hence, it would be absurd to consider Plotinus' influence on Porphyry as necessarily undermining his respect for cultic activities. Bidez's chronology is thus not only flawed because intellectual evolution cannot be considered as going from "rationality" to "irrationality," but also because it simply misrepresented Porphyry's conception of cult.

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[69] BIDEZ (1913), p. 22.

[70] Shaw is a good critic of this trend and is at his best when arguing against the religious divide between Plotinus and Iamblichus: "It is misleading to criticize Iamblichus for his irrationality and to praise Plotinus for his more rational form of mysticism, for both were equally rational within their own metaphysical systems [...] While their respective assumptions about the nature of the soul might be evaluated as more or less rational, I find such judgments to be misdirected. Perhaps because Plotinus' doctrine of the soul—in a highly secularized form—more closely resembles our post-Enlightenment optimism about the rational mind, his form of Platonism has been praised as rational and Hellenic (*i.e.*, more like us), while Iamblichus' Platonism has been condemned as superstitious and Oriental." SHAW (1998), p. 258-259.

[71] BIDEZ (1913), p. 62.

For my purpose, I consider dating either Porphyry's letter or Iamblichus' response without adequate evidence pointless since it would only betray my own assumptions of the authors' milieu. My assumption is that this exchange took place in a context of frictions between a growing Christian counter-culture and the Greco-Roman establishment. The letter and its response were thus probably written at the cusp of the third and fourth century.

1.a.1

Porphyry's Letter to Anebo: *the fragments*

In the 12th century AD, the Byzantine author Michael Psellus could read both the *Letter to Anebo* and Iamblichus' *Response* in the same edition. Unfortunately these texts stopped being copied together, and Porphyry's letter was lost.[72] The following section will compare the remaining fragments of the letter in order to show that Porphyry repeatedly proposed an interpretation of rituals that made the gods susceptible to coercion or persuasion. The largest fragment of Porphyry's letter comes from Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospels* (5.10.1-11), and, compared with the other sources, Eusebius seems to have quoted half of it. On the other hand, in the *City of God* (10.11), Augustine probably summarized the complete letter since he started with Porphyry's inquiry on the daemonic and divine orders (books 1 and 2 of the *De Mysteriis*), and then proceeded with divination (book 3) before tackling the part of the letter quoted by Eusebius. Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* seems to be the most complete source of fragments, and by its overlapping with the two other sources, it is fair to assume that it provides us with a complete account of Porphyry's inquiry.

Eusebius

Eusebius' purpose in the first six books of his *Preparation for the Gospels* was to entirely refute the religious systems of the Hellenes. Starting with their mythological and physical theologies in books one, two and three, Eusebius tackled the Greek oracles in books four through six. In the fourth book, he demonstrated how Diogenianus, among other philosophers, thought that oracles were not only based on fate, "itself a most silly argument," but also, that even if

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[72] SAFFREY (1992), p. 144, citing SICHERL (1957), p. 166.

fate really existed, it would be useless to know it.[73] His main goal, however, was to present the oracles as handed down by evil daemons and to argue that even reputed philosophers like Apollonius of Tyana and Porphyry contradicted the oracles on the subject of blood sacrifice.[74] Book five, directly linked evil daemons with oracles, and made ample use of Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles*. Apart from quoting Plutarch to argue that daemons were subject to death,[75] Eusebius also cited Porphyry's works to prove that the pagans' gods were passionate entities and, consequently, that they could be coerced with prayers.[76]

In that specific context, Eusebius selectively quoted the *Letter to Anebo* to show how Porphyry contradicted himself by presenting, on the one hand, oracles teaching how to coerce gods through prayer (in the *Philosophy from Oracles*), and on the other hand, a platonic theology which disproved the power of these prayers (in the *Letter to Anebo*). By including Porphyry's letter in a condemnation of oracular science and demonology, Eusebius distorted the tone of Porphyry's letter. Thus, Eusebius is deceptive, not because he chose fragments showing that oracles and pagan rituals understood the gods as coercible, but because he critically selected passages of Porphyry's works to show how they contradicted themselves. As the following will demonstrate, Eusebius and Augustine are similarly deceptive because they twisted the tone of the *Letter to Anebo* to present Porphyry as attacking pagan cults. While Augustine's account also make clear that the *Letter to Anebo* questioned the passible nature of the gods as seen in the cults, Porphyry was not trying to destroy pagan cults, he was rather trying to understand them.

Augustine

In the *City of God*, Augustine gives a misleading impression of the *Letter to Anebo* because he incorporated it in a refutation of theurgy, which is not mentioned in the extent passages of

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[73] EUSEBIUS, PE 4.3.

[74] oracle dictating sacrifices: EUSEBIUS, PE 4.9; Greek philosophers' contradicting argument: EUSEBIUS, PE 4.10-15.

[75] PLUTARCH, *On the Cessation of Oracles*, 21 *in* EUSEBIUS, PE 5.5.188-189.

[76] For gods as passionate entities: EUSEBIUS, PE 4.6-9; 5.6-7; 5.11-16. For pagan god-coercing rituals: 5.8-9. I read *muthois* (words), *theiodamoisin … anankais* (god-binding necessities), *aporrētois* (unspeakable things) and *euchēs* (prayers) as meaning uttered words in a religious context. It is important to note that while they are clearly "magical" for both Eusebius and Porphyry, to translate them as "mystic words" or "spells" perpetuates Eusebius' bias. Whoever wrote these oracles surely did not consider it so. The Greek *epōidas* and *euchēs* did not hold the same opposition "spell" and "prayer" have in English. Translators often inappropriately translate *epōidas* or *euchēs* by "spell" if they assume they are in the context of magic, or by "prayer," if they think that the context is religious.

Porphyry's letter. It is rather hard to know what Porphyry considered to be theurgy and if the *Letter to Anebo* was actually about this. Scholars in Late Antiquity usually thought that *Chaldean Oracles* were the source of theurgy. From the oracles still extent, the word *theourgia* is not found anywhere, only "theurgist" (*theourgos*) appears once.[77] The *Return of the Soul*, another fragmentary work by Porphyry, addressed the question of the soul's salvation and, from its evidence, it seems that Porphyry thought that theurgy concerned the purification of the soul.[78] Considering this restricted interpretation, the broadness of Porphyry's questions in the *Letter to Anebo* rather points to an inquiry on cultic practices in general.

The picture we get through Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* also shows the breadth of Porphyry's inquiry; questioning the cosmic order as well as the "road to happiness," passing by divination, sacrifices, and prayers. Augustine, however, inserted the letter in a refutation of theurgy, which consisted in demonstrating that theurgy was no better than magic.[79] Augustine did not deny the physical potency of theurgy, or pagan magic in general.[80] Instead, he tried to show that Porphyry was not able to realize that theurgy was in fact magic, even if Porphyry had in his possession all the evidence needed to do so. Augustine thus cited the *Letter to Anebo* to support his presentation of Porphyry as a philosopher who doubted theurgy's ultimate efficacy in bringing the soul back to its origin.

Augustine and Eusebius were not biased because they presented the *Letter to Anebo* as questioning the apparent evilness and submissiveness of the gods—a belief linked with magic that Iamblichus refuted vigorously. They were biased because they presented the letter as *contradicting* other evidence brought forward by Porphyry in his *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On the Divine Images*. A survey of our last source will finally demonstrate how the problem of god-coercion was found throughout Porphyry's letter.

Iamblichus

Far from being a short letter on theurgy, as Augustine's summary implied, or on the submissiveness of pagan gods, as Eusebius did, Porphyry's letter was a general inquiry on cultic practices. To judge from Iamblichus' response, the letter first addressed how to classify

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[77] VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 136.
[78] PORPHYRY, *The Return of the Soul*, 290F (SMITH) = AUGUSTINE, *City of God* 10.9.
[79] AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 10.9-11.
[80] AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 10.12.

the divine essences (DM book 1 to DM 2.2) and their physical manifestations (rest of book 2);[81] how to distinguish true from false divination (DM book 3); how to deal with miscellaneous contradictions in sacrifice and prayer (DM books 4-6); the value of Egyptian, or rather, Hermetic, prayers and symbols (DM book 7); the worth of Egyptian metaphysics and cosmology (DM book 8); how to understand the nature of the personal daemon and how astrologers (*genethlialogoi*) associated it with soul (DM book 9); and finally, whether "another road to happiness" can be found (DM book 10). As we will see, Porphyry presented numerous opinions in his letter but Iamblichus' response shows that he was significantly concerned with god-coercing religious evidence.

Porphyry first asked "how [divine] essences may be recognized by their activities and their physical movements and their accidents."[82] This is basically what Iamblichus addressed in book one and two of the *De Mysteriis*. The first part of Porphyry's letter, however, not only asked how to classify and understand the different divine entities but also proposed three systems of classification. As we will see in the following section, Porphyry most often relied on the divine entities' passibility/impassibility (*i.e.* the question of their coercion) to classify the divine. The first typology of the divine presented in the *Letter to Anebo* differentiated divine beings with respect to their *bodies:* ethereal for gods, aerial for daemons and earthly for souls. Iamblichus entirely refuted this distinction on the basis that the divine realm was of such a nature that it transcended nature and the human division of passible/impassible, a dichotomy that could not help us understand their extraordinary (*huper phusin; i.e.* supra-natural) essence.[83] Iamblichus even said that the soul, the lowest of divine beings, could not be considered as having this kind of behavior because bodies only experienced passibility or impassibility.[84] The third division, which Porphyry also presented as the opinion of others, separated daemons and gods on the basis of their materiality and immateriality.[85]

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[81] The traditional division of the treatise in 10 books comes from the first Latin translation, made by Nicolas Scutelli in 1556. He also popularized the title now commonly used, *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* (the abbreviated version of the title originally given by Marsilo Ficino in his 1489 paraphrase). *cf.* SAFFREY (1993), p. 144-145.

[82] DM **1.4**.13.

[83] As we will see in section 2.a, when confronted with the possibility the divine could be coerced (or in any way lowered), Iamblichus always argued that the divine is "supernatural" (*huperphuês* or *huper phusin*). He meant by that expression that the divine is above nature, and thus above understanding, or "mystical."

[84] DM **1.10**.34.6*sq.*

[85] DM 1.16.

In light of this issue, it is important to note that all of Porphyry's questions throughout the *Letter to Anebo* addressed the problem of the gods' apparent submissiveness: "invocations are addressed to the gods as if they were subject to external influences, so that it is not only daemons that are thus subject, but also the gods."[86] Porphyry and Iamblichus did not seem to be very interested in characterizing the pagan rituals as "magic." Eusebius and Augustine, on the contrary, tried to demonstrate that paganism was magic by using Porphyry's allusions to god-coercion in the pagan rituals.

1.a.2

Paganism and the religious evidence of god-coercing rituals

It should now be clear that Porphyry's questions presented in book 1 of the *De Mysteriis* were generally aimed at the same idea: gods cannot be submissive, nor can they be made of normal matter. It as also been demonstrated that Porphyry was not only asking questions, but that he also provided some answers, or at least, mapped out for Iamblichus which opinions seemed more reasonable. It may seem heretical for a Platonist, but, according to Iamblichus, Porphyry proposed that gods could be passible.[87] It is perhaps less a surprise if we consider what Plotinus said about magic (*goēteia*) being the same as *sympatheia*, *i.e.* "anything that is directed to something else."[88] Such a reduced conception of divinity (as

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[86] DM **1.12.**40. *cf.* also DM **1.11**.37: "why is it that religious procedures are directed towards them as if they were subject to passions"; DM **1.14.**44 : "Furthermore, the so-called "necessities of the gods" are just that : necessities of the gods, and come about in accordance with the nature of the gods." Iamblichus means that what people thinks are god-coercing rituals (as the *theiodaimoisin … anankais* of PE 5.8, *cf.* n. 11) are not binding the gods but, in fact, bound *by* the gods. DM **1.15**.45-46, where Porphyry is said to have called the gods pure intellects and daemons "participants in intellect" (which Iamblichus presents as the opinion of the majority of philosophers). Thus, if the gods are "unbending and not mingled with the sensible realm", why would it be proper to pray them?; DM **1.15**.47: "But prayers of petition, you[*s.c.* Porphyry] say, are not suitable for presentation to the purity of the intellect." DM **1.15.**48: "But the offerings made, so the argument says, are presented as if to beings possessed of sense-perception and souls."; DM **1.17**.50 : "How is it, you say, that according to your theory both sun and moon and the other visible beings in the heavens are gods, if the gods are exclusively corporeal?".

[87] DM 1.21.

[88] *Ennead* 4.4.43.16-19.

being different from the hypostases)[89] perhaps enabled Porphyry to accept oracular evidence describing how to use "god-binding necessities" (*theiodamoisin anankais*).[90]

As I will show later, by arguing against the submissiveness of the gods, Iamblichus was not just reacting against a new Greek theory. He had to debate this precise problem because the significance of cults depended directly on the gods. Moreover, Iamblichus' emphasis on disproving the gods' submissiveness—and consequently, on disproving the so-called "god-coercing" powers of rituals—shows that his enterprise closely followed the boundaries between religion and magic in order to define Greco-Roman orthodoxy, and probably to protect it from growing Christian criticisms. This effort also suggests that the Christian apologists' focus on the demonic characteristics of the gods was not a complete re-writing of pagan theology with alien, Christian arguments. As will become clear when all of Porphyry's questions are evaluated, the emphasis put on the "demonic," or evil, character of the gods was present on both sides of the theological battle. Since the major topics addressed by both Porphyry and Iamblichus concerned a nexus of beliefs shared with Christians, it would be hard to consider the *Letter to Anebo* and its reply as an exchange of a purely theological nature. Iamblichus (and probably Porphyry as well) not only wrote a theological letter, but he also wrote a political tract separating the good from the bad in religious activities.

In book three, Iamblichus answered Porphyry's questions that dealt with divination. From a close reading of the fragments found in Iamblichus' letter, it appears once again that Porphyry not only asked questions but also proposed elaborate solutions. Moreover, as in the fragments of the *De Mysteriis*' first two books, Porphyry his here again addressing the problem of submissive gods in the context of divination.

As Smith argued, Porphyry sought to explain divination; he was not writing a "frontal attack on pagan religious practice or superstition."[91] Looking closely at the fragments preserved in the *De Mysteriis*, Porphyry seems to have proposed different explanations, accepting some and refusing others. The first category of divination contained "enthusiastic" divination, which did not required any conspicuous human intervention. This group posed no problem for Porphyry. Divination techniques not requiring divine

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[89] Plotinus understood the One as evolving in three different "hypostases" before becoming the world. In order of importance, they are, the One, the Intellect and the (world-)Soul.

[90] PORPHYRY, *Philosophy from Oracles*, 347F (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS PE 5.8.

possession were more delicate. With three general theories, Porphyry accounted for religious evidence which seemed to have been extracted mechanically or even worse, by coercing the gods:[92] 1-"it is through being drawn down to us by the necessities (*tais anankais*) of our invocation that the superior being accomplishes these things";[93] 2-"the soul both speaks and imagines these things, and that they are affections of it which have been produced by small sparks";[94] 3-Divination works within *and* without, when "there comes into being a mixed form of substance from our soul and from an exterior divine inspiration,"[95] which would also mean that humans are creating daemons through divination, and that "the soul, by means of its inherent powers, shapes the products derived from matter into daemons, especially when the matter is taken from living beings."[96] This classification implied that conscious divination (as opposed to unconscious and enthusiastic divination) was either manipulating our soul's imaginative powers, manipulating deities, or creating a third, intermediary substance, which apparently could manipulate both divine and human beings. Moreover, Porphyry also accounted for divination that did not require the presence of divine beings. This, as Iamblichus also explained, was working by cosmic sympathy, according to "nature and skill and the sympathy of the parts in the universe."[97] We can thus classify Porphyry's explanation of divination in three broad categories:

1. Unsolicited possession (oneiromancy being the best example)
2. Solicited possession or revelation (like ritual-based divination)
3. Natural divination, which does not call upon any divinities but rather uses their "traces" or "stamps" (*ichnoi*) left on the cosmos. These traces can help humans to predict the future.

Porphyry assumed that all these types of divination were religious evidence. His apparent ambivalence should be understood as coming from his non-dichotomous approach, not

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[91] SMITH (1997), p. 31-32.

[92] Divination by stepping on characters seemed to have been problematic for Porphyry and Iamblichus (DM 3.13). It is also possible that they had problems against many of the divination rituals found in the *Greek Magical Papyri*. *cf.* PGM 1.262-347; 2.1-64; 4.1-25; *etc., cf.* Betz's catalog, p. xi-xxii).

[93] DM **3.18**.145.4-7.

[94] DM **3.19**.147.16-148.2. CLARKE (2003) translates *pathē* with "conditions," here rendered by "affections." The "small sparks" must probably be understood as divine vestiges left in us by the demiurge, *cf.* PLATO, *Laws*, 3.677b 2.

[95] DM **3.21**.150.3-5

[96] DM **3.22**.152.7-9.

[97] DM 3.27.

from his rational or irrational state of mind. Iamblichus, on the contrary, only considered the unsolicited type of divination as religious evidence.

In regard to Porphyry's theories, however, we can see that some of them tap into explanations, which, by his time, were considered completely spurious and magical. Iamblichus seemed to have been particularly sensitive to god-coercion in divination and in many places in the third book, he not only refuted Porphyry's explanation, but also its assumptions. For Iamblichus, humans were denied agency in divination, as well as in any type of ritual.[98] It would thus have been totally incoherent to assume, as Porphyry did, "toss[ing] in as if agreed upon", that "it is through being drawn down to us by the necessities of our invocation that the superior being accomplishes these things."[99] This refutation was critical for Iamblichus' enterprise, since accepting the fact that divination could coerce gods smacked of magical procedures, a point also evident to Augustine. "No doubt", Augustine wrote, concluding in a few lines what would take Iamblichus about a fourth of the *De Mysteriis* to discuss, "it was not easy for so great a philosopher either to recognize or to oppose boldly the whole diabolical organization that any little woman of Christian faith has no doubt exists and feels free to denounce."[100] Nevertheless, Augustine's quick summary was not completely off track, and, since it reflected Iamblichus' apprehensions, we can assume that the problem of the submissiveness of the divine was an issue shared by both parties.

As we will see, most of Porphyry's remaining questions dealt with the problem of god coercion. Porphyry's questions of books four through seven, cited in Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospels*, revolved around logical problems in sacrifice. A quick look at Eusebius' excerpt will show that most of Porphyry's questions self-evidently fit the topic of god-coercion. While some questions were not necessarily pointing to magic by referring to cosmic sympathy or god coercion, it will be made clear in part 2.a that Iamblichus' answer responded to all of them in the same way: the gods and their rituals are outside the cosmos, they are thus not only free of the influence of *sympatheia*, but also free of god-coercing rituals.

Even if the overall picture does not permit us to think that Porphyry was only interested in *sympatheia* or god-coercing rituals, because Iamblichus emphasized the gods' extra-cosmic nature, it is tempting to believe that Porphyry's inquiry generally attacked the

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[98] DM 3.18.
[99] DM 3.18.
[100] *City of God*, 10.11.

belief that gods could be seduced. The *Letter to Anebo*'s fragments found in book eight (only preserved by the *De Mysteriis*), also seemed to have tried to solve the problem of human implication in god worship by stating that "all things are bound together by the indissoluble bound of necessity;" meaning that, with the appropriate procedures, humans could persuade the gods.[101] In response to Porphyry's opinion, Iamblichus' made clear that the gods were "rulers of destiny"; "all of which makes plain that those verses of Homer which you quote, to the effect that 'the gods maybe turned (by prayer),' are impious even to utter."[102] Iamblichus asserted elsewhere that the soul could only liberate itself through theurgical ritual, a cult designed by the supracosmic gods (*tôn huperkosmiôn*) themselves.[103]

The summary of Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* does not show that the *Letter* was only concerned with god-coercing rituals. Nevertheless, Porphyry repeatedly proposed explanations of cultic activities which implied that gods were submissive. It seems that Porphyry contemplated the possibility that the gods were included in the sympathetic universe, which thus entailed that they could be physically coerced. As it will be argued in the next chapter, Iamblichus did everything in his power to undermine Porphyry's underlying assumption, namely, that rituals are the enactment of cosmic sympathy.

By writing this dense treatise, which is probably the only extant non-Christian comprehensive attempt at defining religion and magic, Iamblichus enterprise leaves us clear signs that the issue of religion was being debated. It is probable that he was participating in a reorganization of Greco-Roman culture in opposition to the growing Christian counter-culture. But before demonstrating how the *De Mysteriis* attempted to separate magic and religion, we will see in the next chapter how Porphyry's approach was completely different in that regard.

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[101] DM 8.7. It is probable that in his discussion of hermetic metaphysics, Porphyry tried to compare them with problems he already found in Homer, and in the Greek rituals.

[102] DM 8.8., and *Iliad* 9.497.

[the philosophy of Plato was rediscovered]... by certain true priests who had adopted the manner of life appropriate to initiation into the mysteries; Plotinus the Egyptian and those who received from him his doctrine, Amelius and Porphyry; and in the third place, it seems to me, those who were his disciples, and are for us at the same level of perfection as statues, Iamblichus and Theodore, and such others as, following upon them in this divine choir, roused their intellect to the Dionysiac frenzy that is induced by the writings of Plato

PROCLUS, *Platonic Theology*, 1.1

1.b.

Neoplatonist priests?

Iamblichus' image recently changed in the historiography, which makes Dodds's description of Iamblichus as "a Neoplatonist interested by magic" no longer appropriate.[104] Andrew Smith was an important figure of this reassessment but the new reappraisal is now surpassing his first efforts.[105] The new scholarship has not only rehabilitated Iamblichus to the status of a "true" philosopher, it has also started to change how we perceive the relationship between Late Antique religion and philosophy. The new "rationalization" of Iamblichus' theurgy challenged the use of terms loaded with positivist criticism, such as "magico-religious," "superstition," or "sinister rites." Moreover, Iamblichus' apology of ritual practice is now accepted as an important philosophical aspect of neoplatonism. But now, with the help of recent scholarship, we can also say that Iamblichus' enterprise was political as well.[106]

The revisionist trend that started with Iamblichus, and which made even the post-Iamblichean "divine" Neoplatonists more philosophical in character, has also been applied to pre-Iamblichean philosophers. The importance of Iamblichus' reappraisal goes beyond

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[103] DM 8.8.

[104] DODDS, "Iamblichus," in *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 2nd edition. Larsen's (1972) thesis was one of the first study reading Iamblichus for his own thought and works (and not for his sources). Smith (1974) also tried to rehabilitate Iamblichus, albeit only half-heartedly. The first genuine rehabilitation of Iamblichus as a philosopher was seen in the works of Larsen (1968) and Shaw (1985; 1995). Two recent studies have pursued this trend and focused on the *De Mysteriis*: VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999); CLARKE (2001).

[105] Smith tried to rationalize Iamblichus' philosophy by separating theurgy in a higher, philosophical part, and a lower, "magico-religious" one : SMITH (1974), p. 122. This system was refuted by SHAW (1985).

[106] VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999) and O'MEARA (2003). Shaw (1995, p. 4; 96), argued that the *De Mysteriis* was more concerned with communication with the divine than politics.

the simple recognition of his own thoughts for what they really were. In fact, acknowledging that Iamblichus could write about rituals and still maintain the figure of a philosopher has now made untenable the idea that philosophers were completely at odds with popular religion.

For example, R. M. van den Berg recently rehabilitated Plotinus' attitude toward cult by studying one of his mysterious sayings.[107] In the *Life of Plotinus*, Porphyry wrote that Plotinus declined Amelius' invitation to participate in the Roman festivities for the New Moon; his answer: "They need to come to me, not I to them," baffled all his students.[108] As we will see, nobody really knows (now as then) what "they" stood for. After Merlan tried to use this example to prove that Plotinus was a magician, Armstrong and many others[109] interpreted Plotinus' answer in part through Porphyry's demonology, an approach van den Berg criticized because it denied any originality to Porphyry's thought. According to Armstrong and Brisson, Porphyry and Plotinus ranked deities attending offerings at a lower status than philosophers.[110] They were either evil or weak demons, which the philosopher should consider inferior to himself. Hence, it is not surprising that Plotinus thought it was worthless to offer them sacrifices. In fact, Iamblichus also argued for the existence of such inferior divinities, which he likened to knives, as divine function-specific tools.[111] Van den Berg built his argumentation against Armstrong's position, and pointed to three problems:[112] 1-Armstrong's argument, which explained Plotinus' statement as rejecting traditional cult, is based on evidence coming from Porphyry, and not Plotinus himself; 2- Even if we assume they had similar views on demonology, they did not necessarily think that the New Moon's gods were similar to the evil daemons described by Porphyry in the *De Abstinentia*; 3- There is plenty of evidence in the *Enneads* showing that Plotinus was not opposed to the traditional cult and that he did not consider matter as completely evil.[113]

Plotinus thought that, by looking at the nature of the world, "the wise men of old" built temples and statues (*agalmata*) to attract gods into them as sympathetic (*prospathes*)

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[107] VAN DEN BERG (1999), p. 345-360.
[108] PORPHYRY, *Vita Plotini*, 10.33.
[109] ARMSTRONG (1989), vol.1, p. 34, n. 1; BRISSON (1992), p. 474; LUCK (1988), p. 108; RIST (1967), p. 199.
[110] ARMSTRONG (1989), vol.1 p. 34, n. 1 understands Plotinus answer through *Enneads* 3.4.6., and the demonology of Porphyry's *De Abstinentia* 2.37-43; BRISSON (1992), p. 474, quoted *Enneads* 6.9.11.9-22.
[111] DM 4.1.
[112] VAN DEN BERG (1999), p. 347-349.

receptacles for soul.[114] By referring to Soul, and not Intellect or just "gods", Plotinus probably considered that the gods at the level of Intellect were not involved in these practices. All the same, it is clear that Plotinus did not calm down the "sacrifice-happy" Amelius because he thought that civic rituals were wrong.[115] Moreover, Plotinus thought that "each god [was] all the gods coming together into one." Thus, from Plotinus' animistic point of view, since god was all, he left no place untouched, and consequently, he could be honored anywhere.[116] This is why he thought that it was useless to honor them at precise moments and places—as during Amelius' New Moon festival. In the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus recuperated Plotinus' notion that the gods cannot be considered as separate entities to argue against Porphyry that gods could not be material, and hence, physically *located* entities.[117] In tune with the rehabilitation of the Neoplatonists' attitude toward civic cult which was started by Shaw's *Theurgy and the Soul*, van den Berg's argument demonstrates that Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus would probably have agreed on matters of cult more than is now usually expected.

As Smith remarked in 1997, we cannot see a change of attitude from a "Syrian superstition" to a "Greek rationalism" between works such as the *Philosophy from Oracles* and the *Letter to Anebo*.[118] For Smith, Porphyry did not have a "constant wavering of opinion, but rather an exploratory state of mind which [tried] to do justice to both philosophical principles and religious phenomena."[119] This is not only a different view of Porphyry, but also a more appropriate one. As Smith did by comparing the *Letter to Anebo* with the fragments of the *Philosophy from Oracles*, I will show that many other instances prove that Porphyry never questioned the validity of oracles or religious evidence. My argumentation will first study Late Antiquity's hierarchy of knowledge, which ordered knowledge on different epistemological levels. Based on Porphyry's interpretation of the oracle on Plotinus, it appears that he valued Plotinus' teachings because he was in contact with the gods—not because of his superior intellect. Finally, by looking at most of Porphyry's religious works, I

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[113] VAN DEN BERG (1999), p. 353; SHAW (1995), p. 11-12. In tune with Blumenthal's criticism of *Theurgy and the Soul*, Shaw acknowledged in his article of 1999 (p. 124) that he misconceived Plotinus' cosmology.
[114] *Enneads* 4.3.11.
[115] *Life of Plotinus*, 10.33: *philothutou de gegonotos tou Ameliou.*
[116] *Enneads* 5.8.9.
[117] DM 1.9.
[118] SMITH (1997).
[119] SMITH (1997), p. 34.

argue that Porphyry was not only "searching [...] for oracular and divine confirmation," as Smith concluded,[120] but that he also tried to adapt philosophy to religious evidence.

The goal of part 1.b is to point to Porphyry's non-dichotomous approach to rituals, in order to contrast it in part 2 with Iamblichus' dichotomous approach. The difference is not always easy to discern since Porphyry also considered certain religious practices as spurious or dangerous.[121] What separated the philosophers was not theology or theoretical concerns but religious practice—theurgy.[122] In short, the true divide was not theological but political. If we accept that Porphyry's conception of salvation was a completely intellectual process, it appears that he made a dichotomy between a "Plotinian," philosophical cult and a popular material one. On the other side, Iamblichus embraced all religious evidence by incorporating popular religion into the philosophical practice of the assimilation to God. While Porphyry's religious dichotomy separated the philosophers from the rest of the Roman Empire, Iamblichus' dichotomy concerned the Roman polity as a whole.

Religious evidence as philosophical evidence

In the *Life of Plotinus,* Porphyry transcribed a Pythian oracle on Plotinus on which he later commented:

> Often when your mind was thrusting out by its own impulse along crooked paths the Immortals raised you by a straight path to the heavenly circuits, the divine way, sending down a solid shaft of light so that your eyes could see out of the mournful darkness. [123]

Commenting this precise passage, Porphyry said that the shaft of light signified that Plotinus "wrote what he wrote under [the gods] inspection and supervision."[124] According to Luc Brisson, this clever interpretation enabled Porphyry to assimilate the *Enneads* to a vast corpus of oracles, and thus, to liken Plotinus' writings to the oracles he selected for his *Philosophy from Oracles.*[125]For Porphyry, then, the oracles gave divine approval to the philosophy of Plotinus.

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[120] SMITH (1974), p. 134.
[121] PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia,* 2.38-43.
[122] Iamblichus separated theurgical activity (*theourgikè energeia*) from theological knowledge (*epistèmènonikè theologia*). *cf.* VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 23-33.
[123] PORPHYRY, *Life of Plotinus,* 22.35-39.
[124] PORPHYRY, *Life of Plotinus,* 23.20-21. Armstrong note that this founds little support from the *Enneads.*
[125] BRISSON (1990), p. 87.

According to Brisson, by explaining the oracle, Porphyry managed not only to bring divine inspiration on the same footing as philosophical or poetical inspiration, but he also gave to the gods a more important role in the quest for knowledge. Brisson remarked that even if Plato already acknowledged the gods as the philosopher's guides, this role was also found in Porphyry and all subsequent Neoplatonists. The Neoplatonists' gods now played a role much more similar to that played within divine inspiration.[126] For Brisson, Neoplatonism was inclined to identify philosophical truth with other kinds of truth, like the one claimed by the diviner, the one claimed by the initiate and the one claimed by the poet.[127]

The introduction of Philostratus (an older contemporary of Plotinus) to his *Lives of the Sophists* probably presents the assumptions underlying Porphyry's conception of true knowledge. When Philostratus separated the art of sophistic in two periods, he distinguished the first sophistic from the second on the basis that the first sophists, as philosophers, propounded philosophical themes. When comparing the different techniques of the philosopher and of the ancient sophist, he drew an analogy with two modes of divination, one human, and the other divine:

> The method of the philosophers resembles the prophetic art which is controlled by man (*anthrōpinē mantikē*) and was organized by the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, and before them, by the Indians, who used to conjecture the truth by the aid of countless stars; the sophistic method resembles the prophetic art of soothsayers and oracles (*tē thespiōidōi te kai chrēstēriōdei*).[128]

Philostratus differentiated the techniques of philosophy and sophistic by using a two-tiered model of mantic practices which Iamblichus and Porphyry also used in their letters. In Iamblichus' terminology the lowest astrological form of mantic art only used cosmic sympathy.[129] It can in no way contact the gods, unlike the higher oracular form.

We cannot tell if Philostratus really wanted to claim that the sophists of old had a better access to knowledge than philosophers. Nevertheless, it is significant that he made this analogy, in which human techniques were said to bring divine knowledge.

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[126] BRISSON (1990), p. 88.
[127] BRISSON (1990), p. 88.
[128] PHILOSTRATUS, *Lives of the Sophists*, 1.481.
[129] DM 3.15-3.17.

As a direct contact with true knowledge, the appeal that oracles had for Porphyry explains in part why he wrote the *Philosophy from Oracles*. Rehabilitating the earlier Neoplatonists' religious beliefs, however, cannot level the differences between Porphyry's and Iamblichus' philosophies. Indeed, philosophers probably had good reasons to remember the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, which said that while Porphyry was erudite (*polymathes*), Iamblichus was divine (*entheios*).[130] In his *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus made a decisive step toward a classification of religious evidence that separated ritual from human art by claiming that art was the work of men and ritual—or theurgy—the work of gods. Conversely, Porphyry had a more inclusive approach to religious evidence and he tried to understand all practices and oracles as a whole, no matter how contradictory they seemed to be.[131] Porphyry, like Plotinus, showed a non-dichotomous conception of rituals, which, far from proving their "rationality" (or, to put it more accurately, their modernity), rather revealed a deep respect for religion.

For Plotinus then, magic (*goēteia*) was the action of cosmic sympathy on the cosmos and was not a defined set of ritual actions. I argue that we have to understand Porphyry's works on ritual through this cosmology. With such a definition, which drew no clear boundary between an orthodox set of religious practices and an unorthodox one, Porphyry had no precise system in which to fit the whole domain of *performed* ritual. Eventually, his approach was criticized by Iamblichus who presented a new cosmology and psychology, in which he could include material sacrifices as part of the *philosophical* practice of assimilation to God.

From a political perspective, the non-dichotomous approach created no firm ethical distinction between good and bad religious evidence. The separation was rather made between philosophers and the rest of the Empire; between an intellectual pursuit aimed toward the divine (*i.e.* rationality) and a material religiosity aimed toward the human passions (*i.e.* irrationality). Unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus embraced all religious activities and ordered them to his own dichotomous system. The divide was not created between an intellectual elite and the rest of the world, as if existed two "religions" (*i.e.* two orthodox systems of religious behaviors) in the same Empire. By saying that the rituals of the populace were bad

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[130] DAVID, *In Porph.* (*proem.*) 4, p. 92.2-7 (BUSSE); AINEIAS OF GAZA, *Theoph.* 634 (PG 85.896b), cited by FOWDEN (1982), p. 36, n. 17.

but nonetheless tolerable, Porphyry's position was ethical, but lacked political clout. Conversely, by including all religious practices (*i.e.* philosophical and popular) in the same religious polity, Iamblichus' separation of good and bad religious practices had more political implications because it addressed the Empire as a whole.

Porphyry's non-dichotomous stance

Following John O'Meara's thesis that *The Return of the Soul* and *The Philosophy from Oracles* are the same work, Pier Franco Beatrice argued that the *Philosophy from Oracles* not only incorporated the treatise now called *The Return of the Soul*, but also *On the Divine Images*, the *Letter to Anebo*, and perhaps also *Against the Christians*.[132] While this is a difficult thesis to support, the assumption on which it is based—that all these works are similar—is correct. As Smith rightly argued, Bidez's traditional dichotomy between an "irrational" *Philosophy from Oracles* and a "rational" *Letter to Anebo* is flawed because too much attention was given to the *content* of the quoted oracles. [133] Bidez' mistake is in part due to Eusebius, who was clearly more interested in the oracles themselves than in what Porphyry had to say. Moreover, as we have seen earlier, Porphyry was not looking to refute religious divination entirely. Instead, as Smith argued, he suggested different hypotheses which could make mantic art part of the assimilation to the divine.[134] A short analysis of these works will demonstrate that Porphyry was dealing with rituals in a non-dichotomous way. The question of the place of oracles in Porphyry's philosophy is more delicate because there are many instances which shows that Porphyry considered divine sayings as the material manifestation of the divine. If Porphyry really considered divine manifestations as such, then he would probably have had no qualms in considering material rituals efficient in the soul's complete purification and unification with the divine.

For Smith, however, Porphyry believed that the oracles only revealed what could be rationally proved and that truth was independent from religious practice.[135] Smith is probably reading a little bit too much of Plotinus in Porphyry here, because, as far as we can tell from

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[131] See *The Philosophy from Oracles* (347F [SMITH] = EUSEBIUS, PE 5.7.6-5.8.7.), where Porphyry cited god-coercing rituals.
[132] O'MEARA,(1959), p. 33-34; BEATRICE (1989), p. 267.
[133] SMITH (1997), p. 29.
[134] DM **10.4**.289.9-10.
[135] SMITH (1997), p. 29.

the beginning of his work, Porphyry set up the oracles as the foremost source of truth : "Sure, then, and steadfast is he who draws his hope of salvation from this as from the only sure source."[136] Likewise, Porphyry not only warned that the *Philosophy from Oracles* would be more about philosophy than about religious practice, but more importantly, that this philosophy would be disclosed "according as the gods declared the truth to be."[137] For Porphyry, then, religious evidence was not subordinated to philosophy. In fact, he rather believed that it was the reverse.[138]

Porphyry's position on divine manifestations was not different from Iamblichus' and, in that regard, works such as *On the Divine Images* and the *Philosophy from Oracles* (which focused on the manifestation of the divine) do not reveal his non-dichotomous approach to rituals. For example, when arguing for the existence of the divine, Iamblichus recalled a Plotinian argument that Porphyry probably acknowledged too. For Plotinus and his successors, knowledge (*gnôsis*) was separated in two kinds: a discursive, human knowledge and an ineffable, higher "knowledge," which Iamblichus rather called a "union" (*sunaphê*).[139] Notwithstanding their common philosophical background, Porphyry's assumption about religious evidence was that the divine could not be *performed* in the material world; it could only be represented metaphorically. This is where the line must be drawn between Porphyry's non-dichotomous approach to rituals and Iamblichus' approach. Porphyry saw divine representations (*agalmata*) and oracles as only representing the gods (and not as *being* the gods).[140] Accordingly, he also thought that, rituals could not effectively unite the soul with the divine because they were a representation of this union.

In *On Divine Images*, Porphyry considered the art of making statutes as that by which humans "modeled the invisible in visible forms."[141] We can infer from this that Porphyry thought that the manifestations of the gods were the symbols of the divine. Making statues thus had nothing divine in itself, it was a human art only pertaining to a higher and ineffable

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[136] PORPHYRY, *The Philosophy from Oracles*, 303F, 15-16 (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 4.7.

[137] PORPHYRY, *The Philosophy from Oracles*, 303F, 25-27 (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 4.7.

[138] See also Porphyry's commentary of the Pythian oracle on Plotinus: PORPHYRY, *Life of Plotinus*, 22.

[139] DM **1.3**.8.2-5: "Indeed, to tell the truth, the contact (*sunaphê*) we have with the divinity is not to be taken as knowledge (*gnôsis*). Knowledge, after all, is separated (from its object) by some degree of otherness." *cf.* PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 5.3.

[140] Iamblichus, on the contrary, argued that the stars (*agalmata*) are gods (DM 1.17-18). He also asserted the divinity of "pure receptacles adapted to the gods" (DM **5.23**.233.9-13), *i.e.* statues (which can also be called *agalmata*: DM **1.9**.32.7-9). Moreover, Iamblichus also seemed to believe that words of prayer were closer to the divine essence than ordinary words (DM 7.4-5).

truth. Porphyry, however, used oracles to prove that the iconography created by men to represent the invisible substance of the gods was correct.[142] Yet, even if *On the Divine Images* is a fragmentary work, it is credible to assume that Porphyry did not claim that some statues were actually *divine*[143] because Eusebius would have used such a statement to contrast it with Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo.*

Porphyry also gave a description of the Egyptian gods and often associated them with the Greek gods, who, as he wrote about Demeter and Isis, could have "the same meaning."[144] Contrary to Eusebius' claims, the *Letter to Anebo* did not contradict such interpretations. In the *Letter*, Porphyry asked about the meaning of the "barbarous words" and of the use of Egyptian imagery which spoke of the one "risen from the mud", or "seated upon the lotus" and "voyaging on a ship, changing shape hourly."[145] Porphyry was not asking these questions because he completely disapproved the use of images. What puzzled him was that the Egyptian assumed their imagery as being literally applicable to the divine.[146] Similarly, he inquired about the rigid use of the names of gods because he did not consider them as encapsulating their real substance but only as being meaningful for humans: "For, I suppose, the god invoked was not an Egyptian by birth : and even if he was an Egyptian, yet surely he did not use the Egyptian language, nor any human language at all."[147] As in the *Philosophy from Oracles, On the Divine Images* presented a philosophical recuperation of popular iconography and of the revealed knowledge found in oracles. As such, it is not in contradiction with any other of his works, and as we will see with his works pertaining to ritual (like the *Letter to Marcella*), his allegoric interpretation of iconography and mythology is coherent with his conception of rituals. In the *Letter to Marcella* as well as in his other works, Porphyry put the emphasis on the meaning of acts, not on the acts in themselves. It is his emphasis on meaning rather than performance which underlies Porphyry non-dichotomous conception of rituals.

Some passages of the *Philosophy from Oracles,* however, seem to give credit to Bidez and other scholars who, like Eusebius, saw a contradiction in Porphyry's works. This

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[141] PORPHYRY, *On Divine Images,* 351F (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 3.7.
[142] PORPHYRY, *On Divine Images,* 354F (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 3.9.
[143] DM 5.23-24.
[144] PORPHYRY, *On Divine Images,* 354F (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 3.11.
[145] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Anebo, in* EUSEBIUS, PE 5.10.
[146] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Anebo, in* EUSEBIUS, PE 5.10.

apparent contradiction is to a large extent due to Eusebius' apologetic technique, which contrasted oracles taken from the *Philosophy from Oracles* to the questions Porphyry asked in the *Letter to Anebo*. The problems with seeing the works as contradictory are twofold. We cannot assume, as Eusebius wanted us to think, that Porphyry read the oracles literally. On the contrary, the short excerpts of Porphyry's commentary on the oracles that Eusebius included demonstrate (in the *Philosophy* as well as in *On Divine Images*) that Porphyry did not accept all the oracles at face value. Rather, he elucidated the "modeling of invisible things in visible forms" with the help of analogies.[148] Likewise, we cannot assume that Porphyry manifested a hostile attitude to rituals in the *Letter to Anebo*. If we can trust Augustine's and Eusebius' appraisal of the letter's tone, Porphyry was more looking for guidance than being polemical: For Eusebius, Porphyry "asks as in doubt," "as though he was consulting a prophet upon secret truths"; according to Augustine, Porphyry was also in doubt and played the role of "an inquirer seeking guidance."[149]

What Eusebius described as discrepancies between the *Letter to Anebo* and the *Philosophy from Oracles* must be read as the reflections of an open-minded pagan. In his *Preparation for the Gospels*, Eusebius not only quoted many oracles from Porphyry's collection which illustrated that the gods explained how to be manipulated by humans, but he also observed that Porphyry himself subscribed to these beliefs.[150] Porphyry claimed that Pythagoras declared that the gods did not have any pleasure in the sacrifices but that they came "because they are dragged by a certain necessity of following."[151] This also seemed to have been one of the conclusions of the *Philosophy from Oracles* :

> For as Pythagoras had made these statements, I learned, by close observation of the oracles, how true his words are. For all the gods say that they have come by compulsion, yet not simply so, but as it were, if I may so speak, by compulsion under the guise of persuasion. [152]

Since the pagan gods could be coerced, Eusebius thought that such gods could not even be called good daemons. Accordingly, for Eusebius, they had to be evil daemons, and he

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[147] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Anebo, in* EUSEBIUS, PE 5.10.

[148] See all of Porphyry's fragments *On Divine Images*: 351F-359F (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 3.6-13, and those from the *Philosophy* which shows the same concern for the confection of statues as *On Divine Images* : 316F-322F (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 5.11-16.

[149] EUSEBIUS, PE 5.9; Augustine, *City of God*, 10.11.

[150] EUSEBIUS, PE 5.8-11

[151] EUSEBIUS, PE 5.8.

[152] PORPHYRY, *Philosophy from Oracles*, 347F (SMITH) = EUSEBIUS, PE 5.8.

concluded that Porphyry's religion was magic.[153] Porphyry's non-dichotomous stance, which included rituals and magic in the same group, seems to have attracted the attention of Augustine as well. By citing both the *Philosophy from Oracles* and *The Return of the Soul*, he presented Porphyry as favoring an interior and intellectual cult over an external and performed cult. After having cited Apollo's and Hecate's oracles about Christ, Porphyry concluded that certain "unenlightened and impious natures" decided to worship evil daemons, for which the wise men of the Hebrews, like Jesus, forbade to give any heed:

> Pretending to worship God, [the unenlightened and impious natures] do not do those things by which alone God is adored. For God being the father of all, is in need of nothing; but it is well with us when we adore him by means of justice, chastity and other virtues, and so make our life itself a prayer to him by imitating him and seeking knowledge of him. For seeking to know him purifies, while imitation deifies us by producing in us an assimilation to him.[154]

Far from being inconsistent, Porphyry had similar things to say on cult in *On Abstinence*, the *Letter to Marcella*, and his *Sentence* 25 (Lamberz) were he wrote that "only like can know like"; meaning, that it is only by imitating the One that humans can proceed to the return of the soul.

Likewise, in *The Return of the Soul*, it is clear that whatever Porphyry had in mind when writing on theurgy, he considered it to be of a lower purifying and deifying efficacy than the intellectual purification proposed by Plotinus.[155] As Smith accurately argued, Porphyry's conception of ritual created a two-tiered system in which he distinguished the good, "traditional" (or one should rather say, new and neoplatonic) piety which can be found in the *Letter to Marcella*, from the bad, "magico-religious" theurgy described in *The Return of the Soul*.[156] Porphyry's non-dichotomous approach to ritual enabled him to incorporate the anti-philosophical god-binding—or as he was more inclined to say—"persuasive" rituals into the religious structure as long as this structure was not achieving the same level of deification that Plotinus and other holy men could attain by pure contemplation.

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[153] EUSEBIUS, PE 5.9; 5.14.
[154] PORPHYRY, *Philosophy from Oracles* 344F (SMITH) = *City of God*, 19.23.
[155] PORPHYRY, *The Return of the Soul*, 286F-290aF; 292F-295F (SMITH) = *City of God*, 10.9-10. And 284F (SMITH) = *City of God*, 10.23, where Porphyry says that the theurgic rituals (*teletes*) cannot purify one's soul.
[156] SMITH (1967), p. 147.

Porphyry's non-dichotomous approach to rituals can be seen at its best in the *Letter to Marcella.* Writing to his wife, Porphyry explained what constituted "traditional piety," and advised Marcella to consider her own intellect as the temple of god—which she should "prepare and ornate as to be befitting the presence of God."[157] Ironically, this "traditional piety" strongly resembled Plotinus' abstract philosophy exhorting the contemplation of Intellect and an indifference to world experience; not quite what the annual festivities and the bloody civic rituals offered. Thus, by being exclusively intellectual, Porphyry's "traditional" religion left no place for civic rituals.

Porphyry wrote to his wife Marcella that the assimilation to God occurs only through the practice of virtue, and that it is impossible to achieve it by using rituals.[158] Impiety, for him, was not to abstain from giving heed to the divine images, it was to hold the opinions of the masses concerning the gods as true.[159] For Porphyry, a ritual which represented a true opinion concerning the gods was not impious or magical, it was simply useless for the salvation of the soul. Thus, even if Porphyry gave all attention to the *meaning* behind actions and words, he also accepted the rituals of the common man.[160]

The same attitude can also be found in his work *On Abstinence* where he again prescribed a ritualistic behavior at odds with what happened during civic rituals. Indeed, as Gillian Clark remarked, Porphyry left nothing for the ordinary people, who only appeared as the foil of philosophers.[161] It is clear that the religious prescriptions found in the *De Abstinentia* were not addressed to everybody in the Empire. When he advised abstinence from animate creatures, it was only to philosopher, and among them "chiefly for those who make their happiness depend on God and the imitation of God."[162] Porphyry was aware of his antagonistic position with the *real* religious traditions and used many different techniques to show that *his* rituals were traditional. His most important line of argument was historical and, ironically, he presented his position on ritual as more "traditional" than the traditional

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[157] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Marcella,* 19.
[158] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Marcella,* 16.
[159] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Marcella,* 17.
[160] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Marcella,* 18.
[161] CLARK (2000), p. 18, citing 1.52.4 and 4.18.4-10.
[162] PORPHYRY, *On Abstinence,* 2.3.

one.[163] Porphyry also used the authority of oracles to prove the error of blood-sacrifice,[164] and he sometimes made use of etymology, claiming, for example, that "the ancients were so concerned not to transgress custom that they called *arōmata* the offerings which are now burned, to show that they would curse [*arasthai*] those who neglected ancient practice and imported another."[165] In short, Porphyry had his own reasons not to engage in blood-sacrifice but he did not entirely disapprove civic ritual and exhorted people to temperance.[166]

In both the *Letter to Anebo* and *On Abstinence*, Porphyry proposed a revolutionary conception of ritual which he attempted to justify by a variety of arguments. On one side, he elevated his own religiosity, or lifestyle, as the only true "road to happiness" and dismissed other religious attitudes as "superstition" (*deisidaimonia*).[167] But on the other side, he respected the common experience of the religious and claimed that he was "not trying to destroy the customs which prevail among each people: the *state*," he wrote, "is not my present subject."[168] His commitment to Plotinus' cosmology forced him to group rituals in the same category, thereby cutting himself from a further dichotomy, which consisted in a political discussion on rites. It is this further dichotomy, between magic and religion, which we will explore in the next part of this study. Unlike Porphyry's *De Abstinentia,* by having the *state* as well as the *soul* as the subject of the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus brought the philosophical discussion of religion closer to politics.

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[163] PORPHYRY, *On Abstinence,* 2.5.

[164] PORPHYRY, *On Abstinence,* 2.59: Porphyry did note cite any oracle but only said "when Apollo advises sacrifice according to ancestral tradition, he seems to encourage us towards the ancient custom"; A custom which Porphyry naturally interpreted as his own.

[165] PORPHYRY, *On Abstinence,* 2.5.

[166] PORPHYRY, *On Abstinence,* 2.61.

[167] *cf.* PORPHYRY, *On Abstinence,* 2.34; 2.60; *Letter to Marcella*, 17-19; *The Return of the Soul* 286F-290aF, 292F-295F, 284F F (SMITH) = *City of God,* 10.9-10, 10.23.

For humankind is weak and small, is short-sighted and has nothingness in its nature. The one cure for its erring nature, its confusion and unceasing change is its sharing to the extent possible in divine light.
IAMBLICHUS, De Mysteriis, 3.18

2.a.

Arguments for a political recuperation of the *De Mysteriis*

The late 20th century saw the first book-length attempts to understand the works of Iamblichus for themselves, and not for the fragments they contained. Both Larsen, in 1967, and Shaw, in 1995, wrote books which took the philosophical status of Iamblichus for granted, something rather new at that time.

Larsen and Shaw, however, did not think that Iamblichus had any political impetus when he wrote the *De Mysteriis*, probably because they were very cautious to read it as a response to Christian accusations.[169] By analyzing the *philosophical* content of the *De Mysteriis*, meaning, the community of ideas between Iamblichus and other philosophers, Shaw and Larsen, perhaps unwillingly, proposed an apolitical interpretation of Iamblichus' thoughts.

It seems as if Shaw, and especially Larsen, were stuck within a late twentieth-century historiographical paradigm which considered Iamblichus as a magician or a pseudo-philosopher.[170] It is probably the refutation of this paradigm that forced them to leave political questions on the side. Fortunately, Shaw and Larsen (among others),[171] have resolved this debate and it is no longer necessary to prove Iamblichus' rationality or importance in the history of philosophy. The political ramifications of the *De Mysteriis*, however, still require more demonstration.[172] Following Emma Clarke and Carine Van Liefferinge, I am opposed to an exclusively "philosophical" interpretation of the *De Mysteriis*. It is in this new perspective that O'Meara's recent book on Neoplatonic political science

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[168] PORPHYRY, *On Abstinence*, 2.33.

[169] LARSEN (1967), p. 14; SHAW (1995), p. 4, 96. Shaw (1999, p. 124) now thinks that the *De Mysteriis* was motivated by philosophical as well as social issues.

[170] DODDS, "Iamblichus", in *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 2nd edition.

[171] *cf.* SHAW (1999), p. 124-125.

[172] Even if he preferred a philosophical explanation for Iamblichus rehabilitation of cult practices, Shaw was clearly aware of its political implications. *cf.* SHAW (1995), p. 144-145, where he used Dillon's comparison

showed that far from being apolitical thinkers, Plotinus and later Neoplatonists considered the divinization of man—which Iamblichus calls theurgy—as part of their political science.[173] O'Meara compared the two movements of the soul (one of divinization, and the other of its transposition down to the level of the political) to be paralleled by the escape and return of the sage in Plato's allegory of the cave: the sage must not only find the way out of the bounds of materiality, he must also return back to free his fellow humans. For Plotinus, the first movement is the "escape" of the soul from material constraints through political virtues; it is a movement toward the one and away from matter, which seeks assimilation to god. The second movement of the soul deals with the reformation of the political level with the newly acquired divine model. It is the same, inverted movement, which removes soul from the One and directs it toward matter.[174]

Drawing on O'Meara's demonstration of Neoplatonic political science, the argument demonstrating the political importance of the *De Mysteriis* will be developed in three stages: section 2.a will show that by meticulously encircling magic and extracting it from his system of rituals, Iamblichus developed a theory of the supernatural which neatly divided religious evidence in two camps: theurgical evidence and magical evidence; section 2.b.1 will show that since Iamblichus' ethical dichotomy involved "philosophical" theurgy (*i.e.* of the Plotinian type) as well as traditional religion, this meant that Iamblichus' dichotomy between the good and the bad in ritual practices included the Roman world as a whole; finally, section 2.b.2 will argue that Iamblichus considered the relationship between the theurgist and the polity to be exactly parallel to the demiurgic, back-and-forth movement of the theurgic soul—*i.e.* as being the two sides of an inseparable movement bringing both spheres of being in a state of equality.[175] To make this claim, I will use Shaw's thesis, which considers the goal of Iamblichus' theurgy as elevating the soul to a demiurgic level, together with O'Meara's insights to deduce the political outcome implied by the cosmogonic goal of Iamblichus'

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of the theurgist purified soul to the *bodhisattva* of Mahayna Buddhism, who takes on a body "for the benefit of his fellow beings."

[173] O'Meara (2003, p. 53) argued that, with Iamblichus, the Neoplatonic schools divided the sciences according to Aristotle's hierarchy. As the highest form of practical science, politics were probably included in the Neoplatonic curriculum.

[174] O'MEARA (2003), p. 10; PLATO, *Republic,* 514a-517d.

[175] SHAW (1995), p. 211; *cf.* ANNICK CHARLES-SAGET, *L'architecture du divin: Mathématique et philosophie chez Plotin et Proclus,* Paris, Belles Lettres, 1982, p. 313.

theurgy. [176] If, as Plotinus argued, order naturally "out flowed" from divine entities,[177] and that theurgy was an assimilation to god, this meant that, as a human demiurge, the theurgic soul's natural outcome was to divinize the rest of the human polity by ordering it according to the divine models she contemplated.[178]

Magic and religion in the De Mysteriis

Both Emma Clarke and Carine Van Liefferinge acknowledged the important emphasis Iamblichus placed on the refutation of Late Antique magic in the *De Mysteriis*.[179] As Robert Lamberton aptly summarized, "Van Liefferinge belongs to a new generation of scholars of later Platonism who neither mock the ritual magico-religious interests of the Platonists (as Dodds did) nor turn a blind eye toward those interests."[180] By presenting the *De Mysteriis* as "a manifesto of the miraculous," and not as philosophico-theological rubbish, Clarke fits Lamberton's description as well. "No one can doubt that theirs is a step forward toward a sympathetic and credible treatment of the Platonists' experience", he further argued, "but on some points, the old guard may prove hard to convince." And indeed it is. Even if he was sympathetic to the new historiography, Lamberton still described the religious bent of later Neoplatonists as "magico-religious," an ambiguous term which says much more about the historian's conception of religion than the Late Antique one. Moreover, in a review of Shaw's book, Henry J. Blumenthal claimed that to argue that material rites where introduced by Iamblichus in the Neoplatonic system is "a step backwards in the process of reclaiming Iamblichus for philosophy."[181] That emperors, bishops and Neoplatonists agreed to call Iamblichus a philosopher should be enough to end this debate. I argue that Iamblichus used philosophy to reconcile different religious evidence as steps on the road to the ultimate

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[176] This is the core of Shaw's argumentation in *Theurgy and the Soul* (1995), *cf.* ch.4. For a concise explanation, see his interpretation of Eunapius' story of Iamblichus' miracle at the baths of Gadara: SHAW (1995), p. 125-126.

[177] For Plotinus' explanation of cosmogenesis as the natural by-product of intellectually "filled" (*plèroumenos*) entities, see: O'MEARA (2003), p. 73-76 (with *Enneads* 3.8.4.31-43; 5.3.7.30-34). For the political implications of "filled" intellects, see *Enneads* 6.9.7.20-28.

[178] Iamblichus clearly shows that he believe this too when he describes the divinized man as the one who was once "united to the contemplation of the gods" DM **10.5**.290.9-11.

[179] VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), and CLARKE (2001).

[180] *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2003.07.40 @ http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2003/2003-07-40.html.

[181] BLUMENTHAL (1997), p. 524.

demiurgic sacrifice. Moreover, this unification of rituals was done by the opposition of an evil and a good group of religious activity: magic and theurgy.

Both Clarke and Van Liefferinge also touched a hot topic, the definition of magic. For Van Liefferinge, Iamblichus' determination to mark a difference between theurgy and magic not only showed how thin was the boundary between the two,[182] but also that the *De Mysteriis* sought to recuperate a philosophically and politically declining paganism.[183] With a very different approach, in fact, condemning the philosophical readings of the *De Mysteriis*, Clarke wanted to "re-examine the *De Mysteriis* as a defense of the supernatural or the miraculous."[184] Both authors' concluded that Iamblichus did not write *about* magic but that he relentlessly argued that theurgy was *not* magic. Van Liefferinge and Clarke also noted Iamblichus' argument that theurgy does not work completely through sympathy (which would mean that the rituals are mechanical and automatic), but that it requires something else, a divine friendship (*philia*), for Van Liefferinge, or something supernatural (*huperphuês*), for Clarke.[185] They are both right, for Iamblichus considered the community of gods and humans as an ineffable, and supracosmic process, a "single bond of friendship, embracing the totality of beings, effecting this bond through an ineffable process of communion."[186]

Van Liefferinge did not realize the supernatural quality of Iamblichus' *philia*, which, as she noted, he nevertheless considered "superior" to cosmic sympathy.[187] As Clarke demonstrated, the concept of the miraculous is crucial to Iamblichus' argument because it enabled him to separate theurgy from magic.[188] It is true, however that Iamblichus also explained the effect of rituals by cosmic sympathy. For example, he supported the use of Egyptian and Assyrian in prayers because he thought these languages more *connatural* to the

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[182] In that regard, her use of Mauss's typology in Antiquity shows how the basic magical principles found in Frazer's Golden Bough do not work. Sympathy and God-coercion are found in religion as well as "magic." *cf.* p. 49 and 52.

[183] VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 19; 41.

[184] CLARKE (2001), p. 2: "to assess the *De Mysteriis* in philosophical terms, to squeeze this square peg into a round, intellectual hole, seems to me an extraordinary oversight. Iamblichus viewed philosophy as a worthwhile but fundamentally limited method of understanding.".

[185] Van Liefferinge (1999; p. 59-70) realized that, as with the coercive aspect of certain rituals, Iamblichus also had to refute the sympathetic explanation of theurgy which equated it to *goëteia*. She did not, however, observed the use of a dualistic cosmology implied by expressions like "supernatural" (*huperphuês*), or "over nature" (*huper phusin*).

[186] DM **5.10**.211.11-14.

[187] VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 70.

[188] CLARKE (2001), p. 19-28.

gods than Greek.[189] Likewise, sacrificed matter had to be connatural to the gods invoked.[190] More persuasive for Van Liefferinge's argument is the *De Mysteriis*' passage on light divination (*phōtagōgia*), which is explained by Iamblichus with the principles of sympathy.[191] Van Liefferinge thus argued that by using cosmic sympathy, Iamblichus wanted to explain the rites mechanically, thus avoiding an explanation through god-coercion.[192] Similarly, Smith also understood Iamblichus' theurgy as being sympathetic.[193] Both Smith and Van Liefferinge are right because Iamblichus often resorted to cosmic sympathy in order to explain the actual *practice* or the effects of a ritual. Nevertheless, he was very careful when writing these explanations and often reiterated the supracosmic origin of these rituals. For example, in the light divination passage, even if Iamblichus used attraction and repulsion (the principles of cosmic sympathy) to explain its practice, he nevertheless introduced these explanations by stating that no matter how this divination functioned, "both the divine presence and its illumination are separate (*chōristē*) from the soul."[194] Thus, even if divination behaved according to the natural laws, the origin of its power was not dependent from the soul, and was thus supernatural.

Clarke argued that Iamblichus' theurgy was completely supernatural, which in itself is not incorrect, but which presents Iamblichus' gods as *completely* removed from the world. While Iamblichus' argumentation supports such an interpretation, Clarke's thesis understated the importance of the Neoplatonic and naturalistic tradition in Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*.[195] It is true that Iamblichus did not ascribe to a cosmic pantheism because an extreme naturalistic cosmology (such as the Epicureans') would necessarily mean that the gods were bound to matter, and thus, coercible; but he did not think altogether that the gods as completely

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[189] DM **7.4**.256. Iamblichus was answering Porphyry's question about the barbarian names, and concluded that if anything, unchanging words were suitable for the gods because "the eternal and the immutable is connatural (*sungenē*) with them." This important passage strikes at the heart of Iamblichus' conservative reformation of religion in the *De Mysteriis*—which is probably one of the most important reasons why he wrote the treatise under the guise of an Egyptian high priest. By defending the use of unintelligible *onomata barbarika* (which are abundant in the PGM, and referred to as *voces magicae*), Iamblichus chastised the Greek taste for intellectual novelties. This self-critique was not new in Greek philosophy (*cf.* Plato, *Laws*, 656d-657a), but seemed to appeal to many other late Antique religious writers (*Corpus Hermeticum* 16.2, *Chaldean Oracles* 150. See also the notes of Clarke [2003] to the translation of DM 7.5.).

[190] *cf.* DM **5.23**.234, were the matter is "of a same nature" (*sumphuès*).

[191] DM **3.14**.133.

[192] VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 70.

[193] SMITH (1974), p. 126.

[194] DM **3.14**.133.9-**3.14**.134.2.

[195] CLARKE (2001), p. 20-22.

separated from the world.[196] Like Thales of Miletus, Iamblichus also thought that "all things are full of gods."[197] As Van Liefferinge also noted, Iamblichus opted for a paradoxical middle course, considering the gods as immanent *and* transcendent; a perspective which can be seen in his response to Porphyry's questions about a world-view ascribing certain geographical places to the gods:

> Divinity illumines everything from without (*exōthen*), even as the sun lights everything from without (*exōthen*) with its rays. Even as the sunlight, then, envelops what it illuminates, so also does the power of the gods embrace from outside (*exōthen*) that which participates in it. And similarly, even as the light is present in the air without blending it [...] even so the light of the gods illuminates its subject transcendently (*chōristos*) [...] Even visible light, after all, is a continuum, everywhere the same throughout, so that it is not possible to cut off any part of it, nor to circumscribe it round about, nor to detach it ever from its source.[198]

Iamblichus often had recourse to the light metaphor when he wished to bring up the immanent/transcendent quality of divinities. For example, one of his preferred divination techniques, the light evocation (*phōtagōgia*) seen earlier, was not only explained with this imagery, but was also implemented through light. Light evocation "somehow illuminates the aether-like and *luminous* vehicle surrounding the soul with divine light," a light which is "from without." [199] It is this luminous vehicle, which the gods "set in motion" in order to seize upon our imaginative power, which, in this case, gives rise to the human experience of the transcendent. What Iamblichus is concretely arguing is that the experience of the gods (the assimilation to the divine) comes from without, not from humans. As such, light evocation was not god-coercive or natural, it was an enthusiastic mode of divination.[200]

As Clarke rightly argued, Iamblichus separated theurgy from magic by postulating the existence of the supernatural and locating the power of rituals within it. It appears that Iamblichus' argumentation closely followed the contours of the traditional Platonic conception of impiety, or, in other terms, magic. As it has been shown earlier, the philosophical tradition targeted two characteristics proper to magic: its claim to have a

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[196] VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 82-85.
[197] DM **1.9**.30.2.
[198] DM **1.9**.30.10-**1.9**.31.8.
[199] DM **3.14**.132.9-12 and DM **3.14**.134.10.
[200] DM **3.14**.133.5-7: "But the imagination is inspired (*epitheiazei de to phantastikon*) because it is not roused by itself, but by the gods, to modes of imagination when normal human behaviour (*anthōpinēs sunētheias*) has

coercive effect on the gods (a claim supported by the belief in cosmic sympathy); and its fundamentally deceptive nature, a characteristic used by Plato to discredit the sophists.

Iamblichus' emphasis on the supernatural, rather than the sympathetic nature of rituals is a direct response to the accusations of god-coercive rituals. Most of book one, which addressed Porphyry's questions regarding theological taxonomy, argued that the gods could not be coerced[201] and that they could not be considered as corporeal.[202] Considering that "good things bear repeating—and examining—often," Iamblichus concluded that the most important distinction between gods and daemons is that the former were "removed from those powers which incline towards generation."[203] The answer, then, to Porphyry's relentless accusations of god-coercion is simple: the gods "remains in themselves, unmixed and supra-celestial (*huperourania*), all together in one in virtue of their eternal superiority." Like Plotinus' apophatic position in regard to the One (*i.e.* that we cannot rationally conceive it), the supernatural quality of the gods rendered human thought completely incapable of attributing anything more to these entities.[204] This is why for Iamblichus, the gods could not even be considered impassible; they were above the discursive opposition between passible and impassible.[205]

Similarly, theurgical unification cannot be understood, it can only be performed. Accordingly, Iamblichus completely turned upside-down what he called Porphyry's "conception of the theurgic technique," which made unification a purely intellectual—and soul-centered—process. According to Shaw, Iamblichus vigorously criticized Porphyry's highly intellectual conception of salvation because an undescended soul could short-circuit the material world on its way back to the One.[206]

By advocating the use of rituals in the practice of assimilation to god, Iamblichus overturned what Porphyry put forward in the *Letter to Marcella*, the *De Abstinentia* and *The Return of the Soul*. As shown in part 1.b, Porphyry set out to show in these works that the true "road to happiness" consisted in an intellectual purification of the soul, even though he

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been completely displaced." On the opposition between natural foreknowledge and supernatural divination, *cf.* DM 3.15-17; 10.3.

[201] DM **1.10**.33-**1.14**.45.

[202] DM **1.15**.45-**1.21**.66.

[203] DM **1.20**.64.6-7.

[204] DM **1.19**.38.5-7. Regarding the similitude between Iamblichus' gods and Plotinus' hypostases, CLARKE (2003) notes that "all together"—*homou panta*—is a favorite Plotinian term for the realm of *Nous*.

[205] DM **1.10**.34.2-5.

acknowledged the potency of some rituals.[207] But Iamblichus was not working against Porphyry with a completely new perspective. Indeed, by showing that theurgical union needed rituals to be fulfilled, Iamblichus was simply modifying Neoplatonism in order to fix problems that came out in the application of Plotinus' new philosophy. For Iamblichus, it seems that the gods were the same thing as the One.[208] If, then, as Plato said, gods were not open to persuasion,[209] how could Plotinus and Porphyry say that the philosopher would find salvation in an "escape alone to the alone,"[210] by going "himself through himself"?[211] In the words of Shaw,[212] this was the "rationalistic hubris" which Iamblichus sought to eliminate from Plotinus' philosophy:

> It is not pure thought that unites theurgists to the gods. Indeed, what, then would hinder those who are theoretical philosophers from enjoying a theurgic union with the gods? But the situation is not so: it is the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, which establishes theurgic union. Hence, we do not bring about these things by intellection alone; for thus *their efficacy would be intellectual, and dependent upon us.*[213]

Iamblichus' defense of theurgy against magic is seen at its clearest in book 3, on divination. Throughout the book, Iamblichus relentlessly opposed natural divination to supernatural divination. True divination (*mantikē*), he wrote, "is not one of the things coming into existence [...], neither is it like an artifact invented for use in daily life, nor is it, generally speaking, an human achievement at all."[214] As with theurgy in general, no matter what seemed to happen during the ritual, divination did not force gods to cooperate with humans. Thus, even if Iamblichus agreed that humans possessed some certain kinds of foreknowledge, he argued that these "human arts" (*anthropinē technē*, as opposed to *theurgikē technē*) consisted in the interpretation of divine signs produced by the gods "through

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[206] SHAW (1995), p. 11-16.
[207] PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia*, 2.43; 2.54.
[208] Proclus accused Iamblichus of equating the "first hypothesis" with "God and the gods." *cf.* DILLON (1974), p. 883.
[209] *Republic*, 364b, 390e; *Laws*, 10.909b.
[210] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 6.9.51: *phugē monou pros monon.* These are the last words of Porphyry's edition of the *Enneads*. For Numenius (frag. 2.10-12 DESPLACES), *cf.* DODDS, "Numenios and Ammonios," *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* 5, p. 16-17.
[211] PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia*, 2.52.4: *Autos de di' heautou, ōs legomen...*
[212] SHAW (1995), p. 5.
[213] DM **2.11**.96.11-**2.11**.97.3.
[214] DM **3.1**.100.3-7.

nature."[215] Likewise, visions in general, like those produced by fever and drunkenness could not be compared with true divination. Besides these types of hallucinations, Iamblichus also warned of the artificial images created by magic (*goēteia*).[216] Iamblichus considered magic as an "image-creating technique," which could not lift soul over the limits of nature, "reaching only as far as appearances."[217] This human technique was thus deceptive and sympathetic. Throughout the following discussion of this "image-creating technique," Iamblichus' description remained very general. Far from making the "image-creating technique" an obscure thing, Iamblichus' generalizations points to the fact that he was creating a fluid category for glitches in religious evidence. In short, he was describing magic (*goēteia*) as the opposite of religion (*theourgia*).

Iamblichus dedicated the last part of book three to the refutation of two false and dangerous methods of divination. He first described the image-creating technique (*eidōlopoiētikē technē*) as a practice which could not reach transcendent knowledge. Moreover, this technique could not even use the divine signs on which the human type of divination was based.[218] Like gymnastics and medicine, the art of making images drew its efficacy from the creative power of celestial gods (*i.e.* the stars).[219] Tapping only on cosmic forces (and not extra-cosmic forces), the image-creating technique had nothing to do with theurgy. Iamblichus clearly stated that it worked artificially (*technikōs*), and not "theurgically" (*theurgikōs*).[220] The same association of magic with art also appeared a century earlier in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana.* Defending Apollonius from accusations of magic, Philostratus compared him with great philosophers, who "were in relation with mages (*magoi*), said things divine, but never degraded themselves to *the art.*"[221] By using the relation between art and magic, Iamblichus could liken the "image-creating technique" to magic and thus discredit it entirely.

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[215] DM **3.15**.135.1-**3.16**.136.9.

[216] DM 3.25.

[217] DM **3.25**.160.11-13.

[218] DM **3.28**.167.9-**3.31**.180.4.

[219] DM **3.28**.169.11-**3.28**.170.2.: The image-creating technique "draws from these emanations some share of creativity, albeit a very obscure (*amudran*) one." Similarly, Plotinus also described magic as using the principles of medicine: *Enneads*, 4.4.42.8-11.

[220] DM **3.28**.170.8. Even though Iamblichus also calls theurgy a *technē*, *cf.* CLARKE (2001), p. 28; VAN LIEFFERINGE (1999), p. 26-27. Van Liefferinge (1999; p. 40-41) similarly argued that for Iamblichus, "il y a tout simplement *technē* et *technē*."

[221] PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 1.2.: [Empedocles, Pythagoras and Democritus] *omilēsantes magois kai polla daimonia eipontes, oupō upēchthēsan tēi technē.*

Iamblichus' second and last discussion of false divination brought the opinion of certain "atheists" forward, for whom all divination was accomplished by evil daemons: "a certain kind of deceptive nature, both protean and versatile, which takes on the forms of gods, daemons, and ghosts of the dead."[222] While Iamblichus never mentioned Christians directly, it is possible that he alluded to them in this passage. First, as with the followers of strange religions or philosophy disturbing the Greco-Roman establishment, Christians were often called "atheists."[223] Since Iamblichus dealt with magic and "atheists" in the same section, it would not be a surprise if he was alluding to Christians here since Christians were also often called "magicians."[224] If we can assume that Porphyry and Iamblichus held similar opinions concerning Christians, the association of atheism, magic and Christianity found in Porphyry's works probably reflects Iamblichus' own thoughts as well. In the *Philosophy from Oracles*, Porphyry elaborated on two oracles on Jesus, explaining how "unenlightened and impious natures" (*i.e.* Christians) resorted to "small earthly spirits and evil daemons, [...] shutting their ears to the gods and the inspired men."[225] The same, shape-changing and evil daemons, which looked like Iamblichus' "protean" spirits, can also be found in Porphyry's *De Abstinentia*,[226] through which, Porphyry said, "all magic (*goēteia*) is accomplished."[227] Thus, Iamblichus' description of "atheist" desecrators (*hierosuloi*) fits Porphyry's description of Jesus' followers. Furthermore, since Porphyry's own Christians dealt with magic,[228] it is tempting to se Iamblichus' refutation of sorcerers (or "image-creating men") as an implicit condemnation of Christians.

More importantly, the division Iamblichus drew between theurgists and the "atheists" prefigured Augustine's politico-religious division of pagan and Christians. For

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[222] DM **3.31**.175.13-**3.31**.176.1; **3.31**.179.9-10..

[223] *cf.* LANE FOX (1984), p. 425-428; BENKO (1984), p. 24.

[224] for Christians as magicians, *cf.* M.SMITH (1977), p. 50-68.

[225] PORPHYRY, *Philosophy from Oracles* 344F (SMITH) = AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 19.23. Earlier in the fragment, these "inspired men" are said to be "the wise men of the Hebrews, among whom was also this Jesus."

[226] PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia*, 2.40.3.

[227] PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia*, 2.41.5: *Dia mentoi* tōn enantiōn *kai hē pasa goēteia ekteleitai*: Porphyry named the evil daemons once in 2.40.1 and continued referring to them thereafter with periphrases like "those opposites" (*tōn enantiōn*) here.

[228] Jerome (PL t. 26, col. 1066d) cites Porphyry who compared what seems to be the miracles of Christians to the magic of Apollonius of Tyana and Apuleius: "Hoc enim dicit Porphyrius: Homines rusticani et pauperes, quoniam nihil habebant, magicis artibus operati sunt quaedam signa. Non est autem grande facere signa. Nam fecere signa in Aegypto magi contra Moysen. Fecit et Apollonius, fecit et Apuleius. Infiniti signa fecerunt. Concedo tibi, Porphyri, magicis artibus signa fecerunt, ut divitias acciperent a divitibus mulierculis, quas induxerant: hoc enim tu dicis."

Augustine, pagans were part of an evil and daemonic community, which used magic as a shared "language." Christians, on the other side, used the sacraments as divine symbols to partake in a good community with God and His angels.[229] Similarly, Iamblichus' "atheists" also were put in an ethical and diametrical opposition: they were excluded from association (*sunousias*) with pure spirits and attracted evil daemons because of a shared kinship (*sungeneian*);[230] the "atheists" prayed for daemons which they called "anti-gods"; their opinion was "nurtured since the beginning in darkness," while the "intelligible fire" (*i.e.* true knowledge) was granted to the theurgists through oracles and "perfect virtue in souls."[231]

Whoever Iamblichus had in mind when he wrote about "atheists," he radically opposed them to the theurgists, and at the core of this opposition, he put the sympathetic origin of false divination. As we will see, Iamblichus used the same argument with sacrifices and prayers. By arguing for the supernatural origin of theurgy, Iamblichus united what he considered good religious practice against accusations of magic.

Under the guise of a theological contradiction, the same defense from accusation of magic can be seen in Iamblichus' answer to Porphyry's question about divine help in unlawful sexual relations. Porphyry asked "how it can be that the gods will not hearken to a petitioner who is impure by reason of sexual intercourse, but nonetheless they themselves do not shrink from leading those who are involved with them into unlawful sexual liaisons."[232] This question not only referred to the popular love prayers and love potions (*pharmaka*),[233] but it also echoed the passage of the *Enneads* described above that explicitly described such acts as magic:

> Because love is natural to men and the things that cause love have a force of attraction to each other, there has come into existence the helpful power of a magical art of love (*erōtikēs dia goēteias technēs*), used by those who apply by contact to different people different magical substances designed to draw them together and with a love-force implanted in them; they join one soul to another, as if they were training together plants set at intervals. They use as well figures with power in them...[234]

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[229] *cf.* MARKUS (1998).
[230] DM **3.31**.176.3-**3.31**.177.6.
[231] DM **3.31**.179.3-**3.31**.1804.
[232] DM **4.11**.195.1-4.
[233] *cf.* FARAONE (1990), which studies the wealth of evidence (literature, papyri, inscriptions) surrounding love prayers.
[234] PLOTINUS, *Ennead,* 4.4.40.9-15.

Similarly, Plotinus later wrote in the same treatise that the "good man" (*spoudaios*) cannot be affected by magic (*goēteia*) or any "magical" product (*pharmakon*) in the rational part of his soul "if falling in love happens when one soul assents to the affection of the other."[235]

For Iamblichus, stones or plants possessing the power to repulse or attract generated things derived their efficacy from human art, not the compulsion of daemons or gods.[236] This description of erotic spells closely fits Faraone's recent analysis of "love magic," which separates it in two categories: *erōs* magic, working through attraction, and *philia* magic, working through repulsion.[237] Iamblichus' description thus not only referred to Plotinus' conception of magic as well as to extant inscriptions, but it also considered it as human art (*technē*), a term sometimes vaguely replacing magic (*goēteia*).[238]

As with divination and love magic, the *De Mysteriis*' other books had a similar claim: true ritual does not come from nature, but from "outside" (*i.e.* the divine). This was Iamblichus' response to Porphyry's questions concerning paradoxical religious behavior, among which god-coercion was the most prominent.[239] For Iamblichus, the answer was simple. Theurgy "is the communion of a friendship based on like-mindedness and an indissoluble bond of unity that gives coherence to the performance of hieratic rites. [...] The works of the gods are not brought to completion in any mode of opposition or differentiation."[240] The gods enabling this ineffable and indissoluble communion[241] were

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[235] PLOTINUS, *Ennead,* 4.4.43.1-8.

[236] DM **4.12**.-197.6-**4.13**.-197.12.

[237] summarized by D. OGDEN (2000), p. 476.

[238] PHILOSTRATUS, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana,* 1; DM **3.28**.170.8.

[239] DM **4.1**.180.5-**6.7**.249.8. Henri-Dominic Saffrey studied DM books 4-7 to show how they faithfully followed Porphyry's questions: "[le texte de la *Lettre à Anébon*] présente quatre paragraphes qui soulèvent quatre problèmes bien exposés. D'abord [1] il dénonce cinq contradictions dans le comportement des dieux invoqués, ensuite [2] il s'indigne devant 'une chose plus déraisonnable encore', l'emploi de menaces dans les invocations, puis [3] il s'inquiète des prières qui utilisent les symboles obscurs, enfin [4] il ironise sur la préférence donnée aux noms barbares pour s'adresser aux dieux." *cf.* SAFFREY (1990), p. 148. The four contradictions are as follow: **1.** How does it come about that we invoke the gods as our superiors, but then give them orders as if they were our inferiors? (DM 4.1-3). **2.** Why do the entities summoned up require that the officiator be just, while they themselves put up with being bidden to commit injustice? (DM 4.4-10). **3.** How it can be that the gods will not hearken to a petitioner who is impure by reason of sexual intercourse, but nonetheless they themselves do not shrink from leading those who are involved with them into unlawful sexual liaisons? (DM 4.11-13). **4.** [How come] priests should abstain from animal food, in order that the gods should not be polluted by the vapor arising from animals, since this contradicts the opinion that they are primarily attracted by odours from living things? (this leads to all of DM book 5, in which Iamblichus answers to the question of the purpose of sacrifices in general).

[240] DM **4.3**.184.15-**4.3**.185.12.

[241] DM **5.10**.211.13: arrētous *koinōnias apergazomenēs*; DM **5.26**.237.9: *kai tēn koinōnian* adialuton [...]*tēn hieratikēn.*

often described as "beyond nature" (*huper phusin*) or "supernatural" (*huperphues*).[242] By this, Iamblichus meant that the cosmic forces of sympathy did not bind the gods. Sacrifice, in fact, was not about ordering the gods, it was the elevation of the soul to their status; a process Iamblichus called "assuming the mantle of the gods." Moreover, once assumed, the "mantle of the gods" enabled the theurgist to set in motion the "creative [*i.e.* demiurgic] cause."[243] As we will see in part 2.b, the argument of the supernatural not only deflected accusations of magic; it also turned the theurgist in a politically empowered "human demiurge." On that effect, Shaw argued that Iamblichean theurgy was about making the embodied soul participate in the achievement of the cosmos by being "the pivot through which the *erōs* of the demiurge return[ed] to itself."[244] This, indeed, can only make sense if one accepts an essential premise: that the divine "eroticizes" itself. Consequently, since Plato's basic requirement for love was the separation of the lover and the beloved, the soul's embodiment was simply the divine process of differentiation through which the One goes in order to "feel desire" for itself. By participating in the divine as well as in matter, the human soul was an *alien* extension of the divine; through its ascent, it returned the *erōs* of the One to itself.[245]

Shaw's interpretation finds support not only from Chaldean doctrine, but also from Plato and the later Neoplatonists. Perhaps one of the most important parallels, however, is the "miracle story" told by Eunapius, which, in the light of Shaw's explanation, truly is a theurgical allegory.[246] In this story, Iamblichus went with his disciples to the baths of Gadara in Syria, where he summoned two young boys, one blond and one black, from two different springs, called *erōs* and *anterōs* by the locals. As a theurgist accomplishing the utmost degree of sacrifice, Iamblichus not only enabled the divine *erōs* to come full circle (by meeting its *anterōs*), but after he performed the "miracle," Iamblichus' disciples "hung on to him as though by an *ineffable bridle*."[247] As we will see in part 2.b.2, this story worked as the perfect

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[242] DM **1.18**.54.9-11; **7.2**.251.9.
[243] DM **4.2**.184.6.
[244] SHAW (1995), p. 124.
[245] PLATO, *Symposium*, 200-202. *cf.* SHAW (1995), ch.11 for a more eloquent explanation of demiurgic theurgy.
[246] SHAW (1995), p. 125-126, with EUNAPIUS, *Lives of the Philosophers*, p. 369-371 (*Loeb*).
[247] *arrētos rhutēr*. I follow Boissonade's edition. W.C. Wright, the translator of the Loeb edition, followed Cobet's emendation of *arrētou* for *arrēktou*. Seeing the story of the baths of Gadara as a philosophical allegory coming from Iamblichus' school (and not from a popular tradition), either *arrētos* or *arrēktos* makes sense since both refer to the "golden chain of Hermes." Moreover, this metaphor not only united Neoplatonists in a holy succession but, in the *De Mysteriis*, Hermes' golden chain could also be good

advertisement for Iamblichus' philosophy. For people unfamiliar with philosophy, Iamblichus would be seen as a powerful miracle worker. But for initiates of philosophy, Iamblichus was presented as the sage of Plato, reaching out from the cave to the Intelligibles, as well as descending back to help his companions.

The *De Mysteriis* thus presented a complex explanation of rituals, which classified them in different levels, each playing a necessary role in the performance of the supreme demiurgic sacrifice.[248] Unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus did not considered the soul's way to unification as a purely intellectual process.[249] The use of materials in rituals was rehabilitated by the principle that being the cause of all, the primary beings "illuminate even the lowest levels, and the immaterial are present immaterially to the material."[250] This is why Iamblichus said that the "theurgical art (*theourgikē techne*)in many cases links together stones, plants, animals, aromatic substances, and other such things that are sacred, perfect and godlike, and then from all these composes an integrated and pure receptacle [for the gods]."[251] Through the unification of material and intellectual sacrifices, Iamblichus gave coherence to a multitude of forms of worship, which could then be opposed to purely sympathetic, and thus deceptive, magic.

Porphyry's subsequent questions regarded the use of meaningless words in rituals, which, he claimed, were "sorcerer's tricks." [252] In the *Letter to Anebo*, Porphyry argued that words of prayers were only symbols of the divine, and that, as such, only their meaning was important.[253] Iamblichus defended the use of meaningless words in theurgy from this accusation of deceptive magic on the principle that being the most ancient, they were closer to the original names of the gods.[254] Moreover, he wrote that prayer words were beyond natural representation (*sumphuonenas*), and were not "comprehended" by the gods, but

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metaphor for Iamblichus' divine *philia*, an "ineffable process of communion" (DM **5.10**.211.13: arrētous *koinōnias apergazomenēs*), as well as an "indissoluble hieratic communion" (DM **5.26**.237.9: *kai tēn koinōnian* adialuton [...]*tēn hieratikēn*). If Eunapius really is handing down a pedagogic neoplatonic myth, it is perhaps revealing of Iamblichus' teaching technique that Eunapius' changed the Neoplatonic "indissoluble community" for an "indissoluble bridle (or whip)."

[248] DM 5.9-10. *cf.* SHAW (1995), ch.14.

[249] PORPHYRY, *Philosophy from Oracles* 344F (SMITH) = *City of God*, 19.23; PORPHYRY, *The Return of the Soul* 286F-290aF, 292F-295F, 284F F (SMITH) = *City of God*, 10.9-10, 10.23: where Porphyry says that the theurgic rituals (*teletes*) cannot purify one's higher soul; PORPHYRY, *Letter to Marcella*, 16-19.

[250] DM **5.23**.232.11-12.

[251] DM **5.23**.233.9-13.

[252] DM **7.5**.258.5 and EUSEBIUS, PE 5.10.9: *ēn tauta panta goētōn technasmata.*

[253] PORPHYRY, *Letter to Anebo, in* EUSEBIUS PE 5.10.7-9.

[254] DM **7.4**.256.3-13.

grasped by an ineffable union.[255] Thus, we can conclude that in the case of the "meaningless and alien words," Iamblichus also resorted to the supernatural quality of rituals to deflect accusations of magic.

Iamblichus consistently used the supernatural argument because he realized that the concept of cosmic sympathy was at the core of the opposition between philosophy and ritual practice. Explaining the effect of rituals through sympathy would have confused them with magic. Indeed, Iamblichus still drew on the authority of Thales' old saying that "everything is full of god,"[256] which problematically placed the gods *inside* the cosmos, and consequently, under the influence of natural laws. But in order to fulfill Plato's requirements of the divine, which forbid them to be submitted to persuasion,[257] the gods of Iamblichus also had to be transcendent, and thus free from the forces of cosmic sympathy. By being supernatural, the knowledge brought by theurgy was completely different from any other kind of human knowledge; in fact, it could be opposed to the image-creating power of magic (*goëteia*) and drug or disease-induced hallucinations.[258] For Iamblichus, divination accompanied the performance of any complete ritual, because divine knowledge (*i.e.* the goal of divination) was a by-product of the divinization of the soul.[259] Thus, by claiming a divine and supernatural knowledge for theurgy, Iamblichus could defend it against people who claimed it was deceitful magic.

The supernatural aspect of theurgy therefore enabled Iamblichus to protect it from accusations of magic, which took their root in the Greco-Roman sympathetic cosmology. Paradoxically, Iamblichus' revolutionary theory of the supernatural, dedicated to the rehabilitation of matter,[260] also presented the gods as separate from it. Shaw argued that an unintended consequence of Plotinus' philosophy was that matter was seen as the source of evil, and could be misinterpreted as a Gnostic cosmology;[261] in fact, the same could be said of Iamblichus since his emphasis on the supernatural quality of the gods radically separated the world from the divine. It is this more dualistic direction that Iamblichus' argument of the

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[255] DM **7.4**.254.9-**7.4**.256.2.
[256] DM **1.9**.30.2.
[257] *cf. Republic*, 390e; *Laws* 10.909b.
[258] DM **3.25**.160.11-13.
[259] DM **4.2**.184.1-**4.3**.186.4; **10.4**.289.3-8. *cf.* SHAW (1995), ch. 21.
[260] SHAW (1995), p. 16; *cf.* chapters 1-4.
[261] SHAW (1995), p. 63-69.

supernatural took in the hands of Augustine, who polarized the distinction between religion and magic even further.[262]

Augustine's conception of magic, one of the many politically-loaded pieces of theology found in the *City of God*, made use of the same supernatural argument in order to diametrically oppose pagans and Christians on the lines of two community, one with evil demons, one with God and his angels. Contrary to Iamblichus, Augustine inserted his work in a political context explicitly mentioned. He wrote that the *City of God* responded to pagans accusing the Christian's lack of faith of having caused Alaric to invade Rome in 410. It seems self-evident, then, that the *City of God*'s division of religion and magic along the pagan/Christian divide was not only ethical but also political. In the last part of the study, we will see how the *De Mysteriis* was a religious and political work as well. Unlike the *City of God*, the composition date of the *De Mysteriis* is unknown.[263] By shedding light on the political implications of the *De Mysteriis*, the following argumentation points to a late third century composition date; a period in which major religious and political problems occurred.

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[262] *cf.* MARKUS (1994).

[263] *cf.* note 17. We know, however, that the *De Mysteriis* was written by Iamblichus because Damascius (*Dubitationes et solutiones de primis principiis*, 1.292.5 [Ruelle]) cites a passage of the *De Mysteriis* (**1.19**.60.5-8) as being from Iamblichus.

And not even those gibes with which some ridicule those who worship the gods as "vagabonds" and "charlatans",[264] the like of which you have put forward, apply at all to true theology and theurgy. Yet if somehow certain things of this kind do arise incidentally in the sciences of the good (just as by the side of other crafts evil skills may spring up), they are without a doubt more especially opposed to those (that are true) than to anything else.

For evil is more opposed to the good than to that which is not good.

IAMBLICHUS, *De Mysteriis*, **10.2**.287.5-12.

2.b.1

The appropriation of the Empire's theological battleground

As Blumenthal demonstrated, Shaw overemphasized the differences between the cosmological and psychological positions of Plotinus and Iamblichus. Shaw recognized, however, that Plotinus and Iamblichus did not consider matter evil, and thus, that they could not be classified in Jonathan Z. Smith's utopian category. J. Z. Smith postulated two different world-views in Antiquity which dealt with the problem of evil: a "locative" world-view, in which things are holy (and right) as long as they stay in their "right place"; and a "utopian" world-view, in which man is born "upside-down," *i.e.* that *he* is "out-of-place" in an hostile world.[265] In the locative world-view apotropaic rituals "relocated" daemons to the outskirts of civilization. In the utopian world-view, apotropaic rituals were directed against oneself in an attempt to "relocate" one's soul to its true home in Heaven.

While Shaw agreed that Iamblichus considered the human soul as out-of-place (*i.e.* completely descended), he disagreed with J. Z. Smith that theurgy was utopian. For Shaw, Iamblichus did not see evil in matter and the world, and thus could not fit into the utopian world-view.[266] But more importantly, Blumenthal criticized the way in which Shaw contrasted Plotinus' undescended soul against Iamblichus' descended soul: "the question of the alleged non-descent of the soul has important implications for Shaw, because it makes him see Plotinus as devaluing the cosmos [*i.e.* holding J. Z. Smith's utopian cosmology] and disallowing it the divine status that it had had in Plato, thus opposing him to Iamblichus who tried to restore it [...] What is different, and importantly so, is the use Iamblichus proposed

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[264] The words used by Iamblichus are *alazōn* and *agurtē*. These are both words which were shown by Fritz Graf (1994, p. 31-38) to have been used in the same context as *goēs* and magos.

[265] J. Z. SMITH (1978), p. 438. *cf.* J. Z. SMITH, "Birth Upside Down or Rightside Up?", *History of Religion* 9 (1970), p. 281-303.

[266] SHAW (1995), p. 9, n. 29.

to make of the divinity of the cosmos, and of man's place in it."[267] If, as Blumenthal argued, Shaw incorrectly presented Plotinus' theory of the soul as completely undescended, then, Shaw cannot explain for why Iamblichus bridged popular rituals with philosophical mysticism by saying that he only attempted to redress the trajectory of Plotinus' psychology and cosmology.[268] While Shaw has rightly interpreted most of Iamblichus' philosophical motivations in writing the *De Mysteriis*, it should not be forgotten that this letter, even if it looks more like a theological tractate, was still a letter, and was primarily motivated by Porphyry's simple questions. Indeed, by demonstrating how books 4-7 were a systematical refutation of Porphyry's questions, Henri-Dominique Saffrey convincingly showed that we must consider the *De Mysteriis* as a real letter.[269] Since the epistolary style in Ancient philosophy was usually chosen for ethical topics, we should pay attention to the ethical character of Porphyry and Iamblichus' exchange. Shaw, however, was not oblivious to the political character of theurgy and also recognized that Iamblichus probably reacted to the socio-political changes of the late third and early fourth century. Despite nineteenth-century attempts by German scholars to present the *De Mysteriis* as the "élaboration d'une théologie savante pour le paganisme en opposition avec la théologie Chrétienne," Larsen discredited this avenue on the basis that he could not find any explicit mention of Christians in Iamblichus' works. [270] Putting the question of Christians on the side for the time being, the following will demonstrate how Iamblichean theurgy was a politically charged treatise.

The political interpretation of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* which I will further present could be compared with J. Z. Smith's third Late Antique "world-map," which seems to have escaped Shaw's attention:

> In the locative cosmology, the demonic was the out-of-place on an essentially horizontal map of center and periphery, of domains and boundaries. In the utopian cosmology, it is man who is out-of-place on an essentially vertical map of 'this world' and the 'Beyond.' There is yet a further Late Antique map which returns to the horizontal but which abandoned the

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[267] BLUMENTHAL (1997), p. 521.

[268] Iamblichus thought that some part of the soul (the "luminous vehicle": *augoeides ochēma*) still stayed "up": DM **8.6.**269.1-**8.7.**270.2 (citing Hermetic wisdom); DM **8.7**.270.11-12 (describing a noetic and seemingly undescended soul). *cf.* SHAW (1995), p. 107-109.

[269] SAFFREY (1990), p. 146.

[270] LARSEN (1972), p. 14, citing KELLNER (1867). This interpretation was presented by FABRICIUS-HARLESS (1796), as well as MAU (1914), in the RE.

> cosmological for the anthropological. Here the boundary, which protects man against external, hostile powers becomes the religious association, the social group.[271]

J. Z. Smith's third world-map did not threaten, as Iamblichus feared, to desacralize the cosmos.[272] It rather presented a new cosmology where humanity and divinity were brought closer together and bound in communities based on a shared religious "language." From the close unification of human and divine life, political oppositions were aligned on the same front as divine oppositions. Far from desacralizing the power of the gods to an "anthropological" level, this cosmology lifted political strife to a divine level.

There is no explicit argument in the *De Mysteriis* which would prove its political character beyond all doubt. For lack of evidence, one could point to the important political careers most of Iamblichus' students had;[273] or to the political potential of his own works, as Julian's fascination for Iamblichus' writings demonstrated.[274] The following, however, will highlight the political implications of the *De Mysteriis* according to a modern conception of politics. The second section (2.b.2) will demonstrate that the political principles of neoplatonism made political implication the consequence of theurgical union.

"For evil is more opposed to the good than to that which is not good"

O'Meara defined political philosophy as "the study of social structures, the principles of human social organization, and their realization (in constitutional order, legislation, and jurisdiction) to the extent required for achieving, in part at least, the human good."[275] Similarly, I define political *action* as the protection or the imposition one's ideal community (*i.e.* what one thinks is the happiest form of existence). In the context of Late Antiquity, religious evidence was a crucial aspect of the ideal community since it was considered to be a window on divine life, the best form of existence. By opposing true and false religious

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[271] J. Z. SMITH (1978), p. 438.

[272] DM **1.8**.28.6-11.

[273] Two of Iamblichus' pupils had political careers: Sopatros joined the court of Constantine but was accused of practicing magic and was beheaded. He was blamed of having "fettered the winds" bringing the corn supply to Constantinople (EUNAPIUS, *Lives of the Sophists*, p. 384 [Loeb]); Eustathius was sent at the Persian court in 358 as an ambassador of Constantius II (EUNAPIUS, *Lives of the Sophists*, p. 465-466 [Wright]); *cf.* O'MEARA (2003), p. 17-19 and R. PENELLA, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists in the Fourth Century A.D. Studies in Eunapius of Sardis*, Leeds, 1990, p. 49-51.

[274] As Iamblichus, Julian thought that, because of our own material condition, material cults served as necessary intermediaries between the natural and the transcendent world: JULIAN, *Letters*, 89.293b-296b. On Julian's interest in Iamblichean philosophy, *cf.* WITT (1974).

[275] O'MEARA (2003), p. 7.

evidence, the *De Mysteriis* vigorously defended its conception of the divine life, and thus took part in a political debate. Moreover, as a rulebook distinguishing true from false religious evidence, the *De Mysteriis* had important political implications since it tried to create an ineffable—and unquestionable—theological foundation for the Empire. As the source of all knowledge and all power, good communication with the divine was an important aspect of politics in Antiquity. In that regard, one of the most pertinent examples of the importance of accurate communication between emperors and the divine is the decision of the Tetrarchy to implement the general edict of persecution in 303. According to Lactantius, it was an unsuccessful attempt at divination made by court *haruspices* (seers) that later spurred the tetrarchs in persecuting the Christians.[276] Along with other emperors of the third century, such as Aurelian, Diocletian lifted the figure of the emperor above the status of normal humans. As coins, court ceremonial and panegyrics signified, the emperors were now at best divine, or, at least "God's friend."[277]

To my knowledge, no extent treatise before the *De Mysteriis* tried to polarize good and bad religious behaviors within the Empire, while not entirely discrediting them in the process. It is true that many centuries before, Varro systematized Roman religion in his lost books of *Antiquities*. From what Augustine tells us, however, the *Antiquities* were a systematic *account* of religious institutions, in a more encyclopedic, rather than polemical style.[278] Theophrastus also wrote a book *On Piety*, which was abundantly cited by Porphyry in his *De Abstinentia*. According to Porphyry, Theophrastus had arguments against the sacrifice of animals, but it is difficult to say if his account had Porphyry's elitist approach or Iamblichus' more inclusive one.[279] Closer to Iamblichus, Porphyry criticized traditional piety and proposed alternative solutions for philosophers. As we have seen earlier, the *Letter to Marcella* explicitly presented Porphyry's alternative to the practices he scorned in his other works. Nevertheless, his philosophical position on matters of ritual was so intellectual that he discredited the use—and users—of material offerings.[280] Indeed, by refusing to consider that material sacrifice could be useful for the salvation of the soul, Porphyry removed himself from the theological "battleground" on which Iamblichus fought. In contrast with the *De*

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[276] LACTANTIUS, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 10-11.
[277] DEPALMA DIGESER, (2000), p. 3; DRAKE (2000), p. 129, 184-185.
[278] AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 4.1.
[279] PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia*, 2.32.3.
[280] PORPHYRY, *De Abstinentia*, 1.52.4; 2.34; 4.18.4-10

Mysteriis, which included rituals for people of all sorts in theurgy,[281] Porphyry wrote in the *Return of the Soul* that he had never found the road to happiness *for all*.[282]

For Iamblichus, the good and the bad in religion took the opposite form of theurgy (*theourgia*) and magic (*goēteia*). According to the political circumstances and some references to *atheoi* seen earlier, it is tempting to think that the *De Mysteriis* was written to associate Christians with *goēteia*. Iamblichus would not be the first to call Jesus and Christians priests "sorcerers."[283] Nor would he be the last, since Christians reserved the same name for non-Christian wonder-workers.[284] Nevertheless, by discriminating good from bad religious evidence, Iamblichus not only created a theological boundary, but he also created a political one. Religious activity was linked with social, political and intellectual life. In that context, Iamblichus' polarization of cult practices offered sound theological foundations for the implementation of religious legislation. The *De Mysteriis* was not written solely for political purposes; nevertheless, by its dichotomous approach and, as we will see, his association of theurgy with demiurgic activity, Iamblichus could not have written it without thinking about its political influence.

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[281] DM 5.15-5.19.
[282] PORPHYRY, *The Return of the Soul*, 302F (SMITH) = AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, 10.32.
[283] M.SMITH (1977), p. 50-68; AUNE (1980), p. 1523-1544.
[284] *cf.* MARKUS (1994).

Perhaps also it was because Minos attained this kind if union that he was said in the story to be "the familiar friend of Zeus", and it was in remembering this that he laid down laws in its image, being filled full in lawgiving by the divine touch
PLOTINUS, *Ennead,* 6.9.7.23-26.

2.b.2

Theurgists as demiurges: the political implications of theurgy

According to a recent book by Dominic J. O'Meara, historians should reconsider the assumption that Neoplatonism was a system that excluded political philosophy on principle because it negated the realm of the senses.[285] It is true that Porphyry presented Plotinus as exhorting his students to escape political life. The same thing, however, could be said of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations.* Following O'Meara's advice, one should not confuse the withdrawal from politics with the rejection of political responsibilities; indeed, if we should read the philosophers literally, Socrates himself would be an apolitical thinker.[286]

Moreover, the Neoplatonists' philosophical withdrawal from politics bears striking similarities with another late Antique *topos*, the senatorial infatuation with *otium*; a life of scholarly leisure, far away from the cities' corruption.[287] In *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court AD 364-425*, John Matthews convincingly debunked the idea that Roman senators indulged in a life of *otium*, which their published correspondence pictured with gusto.[288] For Matthews, this "affectation" should not obscure the fact that senators were deeply involved in politics and that they took their responsibilities (and their power) seriously. That Neoplatonists sported a similar apolitical attitude suggests that Late Antique philosophers and senators (who often intermingled)[289] both expressed the same ideal life of *otium* with their own idioms. Often translated as "leisure", *oitum* was not equivalent to what we now

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[285] O'MEARA (2003), p. 3-4.
[286] O'MEARA (2003), p. 4-7, citing PORPHYRY, *Life of Plotinus*, 7.17-21; 7.31-46; MARCUS AURELIUS, 8.48; PLATO, *Apology*, 31d-32a.
[287] MATTHEWS (1975), p. 11.
[288] MATTHEWS (1975), p. 30.
[289] O'MEARA (1994), p. 65, citing G. FOWDEN, *Pagan Philosophers in late antique Society, with special reference to Iamblichus and his followers,* Oxford D. Phil thesis 1979, p. 193.

think of as "leisure time," but rather (good) time spent studying the liberal arts, away from corruption, and preferably in a bucolic villa. These senatorial "affectations" were not just feigned modesty emulating Octavius' political "beau geste", they were also a manifestation of the real importance classical *paideia* had for people in positions of power.[290] Thus, I suspect that the right demeanor for a philosopher who wanted to influence the senatorial and Imperial families was one of detachment. A politically aggressive stance would be completely at odds with the figure of the Neoplatonist, calm and in full possession of the "political virtues."[291] In short, the best way for a philosopher to influence politicians was probably to show that he was above such interests.

Political virtues and the assimilation with the divine

In *Platonopolis*, O'Meara defended the idea that Neoplatonists not only attempted to achieve the divinization of the soul through unification with the One, but that they also understood this unification as the divinization of the political community.[292] The thesis is particularly hard to prove because Neoplatonists rarely addressed political issues directly. But more importantly, O'Meara's thesis is difficult because the principal argument holding it together rests on a Neoplatonic paradox: that we must consider the ascent of the soul (through the exercise of political virtues), and its "later" descent (bringing the "divine life to expression on the political level") as two aspects of one process.[293] Plotinus was indubitably a great intellectual who, like Plato in the *Republic*, could integrate historical, metaphysical, as well as, political ideas into a single philosophical system.[294] Plotinus then was a worthy successor to Plato in that respect, and, as O'Meara showed, his theory of the soul's divinization necessarily implied that the god-like philosopher was a philosopher-king.

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[290] Having taken care of the military problems of the late Republic, Octavian went to the senate to give back the *imperium* (military command) they offered him. Instead of accepting Octavian's withdrawal, the senate offered him a new title, *Augustus*. In the words of Hal Drake (2001; p. 39), "the gesture had the effect of transferring Octavian's title, so to speak, from the armies to the Senate, for in giving him the name *Augustus*, the Senate also gave Octavian an alternative sanction for his rule, one that was stronger and more stable than the armies could provide." As with the Late Antique senatorial "affectations," Octavian's "gesture" was a rather cynical and political maneuver. On *paideia*, *cf.* BROWN (1992), p. 56-70.

[291] *cf.* O'MEARA (2003), p. 3-4 (with n. 20); p. 40-44. The "political virtues" of Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.2), as will be demonstrated in the next section, concerned the polity of the soul (*i.e.* the mastery of irrational impulses), and by extension, included the social polity as well.

[292] O'MEARA (2003), p. 10.

[293] O'MEARA (2003), p. 29. *cf.* also Shaw (1995), p. 211.

In *Ennead* 1.2 "On Virtues", Plotinus described Plato's cardinal virtues of practical wisdom (*prhonēsis*), courage (*andria*), moderation (*sōphrosunē*) and justice (*dikaiosunē*) as the "political virtues" (*tas politikas aretas*), bringing divine measure to an otherwise irrational and indefinite mixture of body and soul.[295] The possession of political virtues did not make one divine, although, by being similar to the state enjoyed by divine entities, these virtues helped the soul in its divinization. They were, therefore, the first steps toward assimilation to the divine.[296] The true assimilation to god, however, was only achieved by mastering the higher, "purificatory" level of virtue.[297]

Plotinus' concept of scales of virtues might seem, at first, to have little to do with politics, especially if one takes the name of "political virtues" only metaphorically. As O'Meara remarked, however, these two levels of virtues corresponded to two different orientations of the soul: one aimed toward the body, as with political virtues, and one aimed "upward" to the divine, as with purificatory virtues.[298] Furthermore, these two orientations took on a more political tone if one compared them to the ascent and re-descent of the sage in Plato's allegory of the cave.[299]

This comparison would just be a comparison if Plotinus did not think that beings filled with pure contemplation were naturally productive. In the *Ennead* 3.8, "On Nature and Contemplation", Plotinus playfully proposes that the reader perform a "thought experiment":

> Suppose we said, playing at first before we set out to be serious, that all things aspire to contemplation, and direct their gaze to this end—not only rational but irrational living things, and the power of growth in plants, and the earth which brings them forth [...]—could anyone endure the oddity of this line of thought?[300]

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[294] See the introduction of Georges Leroux to his new translation of the *Republic*: PLATON, *La République, traduction, introduction et notes par Georges LEROUX*, GF-Flammarion, 2002, p. 11-15.

[295] PLOTINUS, *Enneads* 1.2.2.13-20: "And as so far as [the political virtues] are a measure which forms the matter of the soul, they are made like the measure There (*tōi ekei metrōi*) and have a trace in them of the best There." See also 1.2.3.11-21.

[296] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 1.2.1.15 and 46-52; 1.2.2.-14; 1.2.16-18. *cf.* O'MEARA (2003), p. 9-10; 41-43.

[297] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 1.2.1.22 and 26; 1.2.7.10-12; 1.2.3.2.

[298] O'MEARA (2003), p. 42.

[299] O'MEARA (2003), p. 10.

[300] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 3.8.1.1-8.

The rest proves that Plotinus could; if one ought to ask nature why it created the world, it would probably answer that "what comes into being" is an object of contemplation which comes *naturally*, as nature itself was produced from an higher contemplation.[301]

For Plotinus, there are two kinds of production. One which is a by-product of self-contemplation (the kind of which nature enjoys), and another that results in a want of contemplation, and which hopelessly produces artificial copies of it. By starting with the One, each hypostasis contemplates itself and creates the next hypostasis as a by-product.[302] Thus contemplation, or one should rather say the *love* of contemplation (the *erōs* and *philia* of Iamblichus), is what explained the creation of nature; a blurred image of a stronger and clearer "self-contemplating" picture.[303] Likewise, humans could also experience this perfect self-contemplation despite the fact that it gradually weakened as one reproduced the number of copies and removed himself from the original:

> When they make something, then, it is because they want to see their object themselves and also because they want others to be aware of it and contemplate it, when their project is realized in practice as well as possible. Everywhere we shall find that making and action are either a weakening or a consequence of contemplation; a weakening, if the doer or maker had nothing in view beyond the thing done, a consequence if he had another prior object of contemplation better than what he made.[304]

Plotinus' last sentence implied that humans "filled" (*plēroumenos*) with contemplation could also enjoy the higher kind of production; a production which does not originate in the need to produce but in the contemplation of perfect things. If self-contemplation—which is the contemplation of the One through our "undescended" soul—could occur in a human being, then this person would naturally be a producer. But what could a *plēroumenos* human produce? Considering what Plotinus said about the ordering power of the soul's political virtues, which are imitation of the true divine "virtues,"[305] we can infer that this production would involve some kind of "measuring" virtue-like production, *i.e.* the organization of a

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[301] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 3.8.4.1-7.
[302] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 3.8.4.11-13.
[303] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 3.8.4.14-30.
[304] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 3.8.4.31-43. *cf.* O'MEARA (2003), p. 75-76.
[305] Plotinus did not want to name the highest, "purificatory" virtues because he considered that it was impossible to give discursive predicates to the divine. This application of negative theology is explained by O'Meara (2003), p. 42.

spiritual *and* social polity. Indeed, in a passage that recalls Plato's philosopher-king, Plotinus used the same concept of production as a by-product of "contemplation-filled" entities:

> And having been in [the One's] company and had, so to put it, sufficient converse with it, [the soul must] *come and announce, if it could, to another that transcendent union.* Perhaps also it was because Minos attained this kind of union that he was said in the story to be the familiar friend of Zeus, and it was in remembering this that he laid down laws in its image, being filled full of lawgiving by the divine contact.[306]

Thus, Plotinus' unification with the One necessarily proceeded through the practice of "political virtues," which itself was a preparation work for the practice of the purificatory and divine virtues. For Plotinus, the purified state was in fact a state of unity with the One. This "filled" state would then bring an ordering power, which would probably[307] manifest itself down in the realm of political virtues. This realm was not identical to the state enjoyed by divine entities, but nonetheless similar—and essential for humans on the "road to happiness."[308] As O'Meara showed, Porphyry, Iamblichus and the later Neoplatonists' reinterpretation of Plotinus' scale of virtues linked the elevation of the soul even more closely with its political descent.[309] As we will see, Iamblichus theurgy expressed in philosophical terms what Plotinus said metaphorically by referring to Minos' legislation.

Theurgy as demiurgy

Shaw's major thesis in *Theurgy and the Soul* is that Iamblichus' theurgy lifted the theurgist to the level of a demiurge: "correlate to this axiom" he wrote, "is the view that the ascent of the soul in theurgy was realized as a cosmogonic descent, that procession and return were not opposed to one another but that the soul's return confirmed the divinity of its procession."[310] For Iamblichus, the theurgic soul took on "the shape of the gods," and was "perfectly established in the activities and the intellections of the demiurgic powers."[311] In that respect, Iamblichus seems to have agreed with Calvenus Taurus' opinion on the soul,

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[306] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 6.9.7.20-25.
[307] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 6.9.7.26-28: "Or, also, [the soul] may think political matters unworthy of it and want to remain always above; this is liable to happen to one who has seen much."
[308] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 1.2.2.22-26. *cf.* O'Meara's discussion of Plotinus' two kinds of assimilation, reciprocal and identical, p. 9-10; p. 41-42.
[309] O'MEARA (2003), p. 44-49.
[310] SHAW (1995), p. 211-212. *cf.* also p. 51-57 and p. 124-126.
[311] DM **4.2**.184.1-8; DM **10.6**.292.10-12.

which he cited first in his review of philosophers' psychologies in the *De Anima*. Calvenus maintained that the demiurge sent souls to earth to complete the cosmos, and to reveal the life of the gods in the "pure and faultless life of the souls."[312] Like Plotinus' scale of virtues, Iamblichus' scale of rituals in theurgy aimed toward the assimilation of the soul to the divine. But more importantly, I argue that Iamblichus' emphasis on the assimilation of soul to the generative (*i.e.* demiurgic) powers meant that, like Plotinus' Minos, the theurgist would naturally become an ordering power in the cosmos. Since Iamblichus thought of political organizations as part of the divine ordering, the demiurgic theurgist would also become, like Minos, a divine legislator for the human polity. Moreover, the theurgic soul's ascension could not be separated from its "cosmogonic" descent, and thus, theurgical activity (procession) could not be separated from political activity (descent).

In order to show Iamblichus' interest in Aristotelian political science (*politikē epistēmē*), O'Meara pointed to Iamblichus' *De Communi Mathematica Scientia*, which maintained that mathematics permeated all sciences, down to politics and "the ordered movement of actions."[313] Moreover, in his letters, Iamblichus not only supported the common opinion that rulers had to look for the welfare of their subjects, [314] but, more importantly, he also asserted that the good of the whole was inseparable from the good of its parts.[315] For O'Meara, this passage suggests that Iamblichus had an organic conception of polities in which the good of the rulers and the good of the ruled were intimately bound. O'Meara's thesis becomes even more compelling if we compare it with Iamblichus' description of the true and complete (theurgic) ritual. By "moving" all causes, the theurgist also moved the demiurgic causes, from which "descend[ed] a common benefit to the whole realm of generation, sometimes upon cities and peoples, or nations of all sorts, or other segments of humanity larger or smaller than these..."[316] Thus, since theurgy involved cosmogony (*i.e.* the divinization of self involved a divinization of the cosmos), the Iamblichean theurgist aptly suited Plotinus' metaphor of the divine legislator. Like the divine king Minos, the theurgists

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[312] SHAW (1995), p. 143-144, citing Iamblichu, *De Anima*, *in* STOBAEUS, *Anthology*, 1.378,25-28; 1.379.2-6.
[313] IAMBLICHUS, *De Communi Mathematica Scientia*, 56.4; 91.27 (FESTA), cited by O'MEARA (1992), p. 66.
[314] IAMBLICHUS, *Letter to Dyscolius*, *in* STOBAEUS, *Anthology*, 4.p. 222.10-14 cited by O'MEARA (2003), p. 87.
[315] IAMBLICHUS, *Letter to Dyscolius*, *in* STOBAEUS, *Anthology*, 4.p. 222.14-18 cited by O'MEARA (2003), p. 88. *cf.* also Iamblichus' letter on marriage: STOBAEUS, *Anthology*, 4.p. 587.15-588.2.
[316] DM **5.10**.211.3-14.

would draft legislation for human beings after having been "filled" with Zeus' divine laws of creation.

O'Meara's thesis finds better support from the *De Mysteriis* than from Plotinus' *Enneads*. Indeed, for Plotinus, a human "filled" with the divine did not necessarily try to share his experience.[317] In Iamblichean theurgy, however, political activity was more strongly linked with the accomplishment of the perfect theurgical rituals:

> What I mean is, that [theurgy] connects the soul individually to the self-begotten and self-moved god, and with the all-sustaining, intellectual and adorning power of the cosmos, and with that which leads up to the intelligible truth, and with the perfect and effected and other demiurgic powers of the god, so that the theurgic soul is perfectly established in the activities and the intellections of the demiurgic powers.[318]

The goal of theurgy was to lift humans to the level of the demiurge. Since, for Iamblichus, the individual good was included in the global good,[319] then as a demiurge, the theurgist necessarily had to go through an ordering of the polity when he ordered the cosmos.

Iamblichus never explicitly claimed that philosophers had to be involved in politics. And indeed, it might have been dangerous for him and his students if he would have done so. Nevertheless, the comparison of O'Meara's evidence with Shaw's thesis equating theurgy with demiurgy makes political involvement the natural consequence of the theurgist's demiurgic state.

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[317] PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, 6.9.7.26-28.
[318] DM **10.6**.292.7-12. *cf.* also DM **4.2**.184.1-10.

The place of evil in social systems

As we have seen with the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus seemed to have pushed the political implications of Neoplatonism even further than Plotinus had. This brings new evidence supporting Fabricius' late eighteenth century thesis that presented the exchange between Porphyry and Iamblichus as the product of growing Christian influence on the Greco-Roman establishment.[320] As Larsen noted, the absence of explicit references to Christians in both letters makes the thesis hard to uphold, but now that Iamblichus political involvement has been demonstrated according to his own philosophy, we have more reason to think that the *De Mysteriis* was in part written as a political plan for the restructuring of the Roman Empire.

Moreover, some theological opinions brought forward by Iamblichus reflected a nexus of theological beliefs shared by both Hellenic and Christian authors, who had been educated through the same literature. As we saw earlier, divine passibility or impassibility was a crucial aspect of the *Letter to Anebo* and it also consequently organized Iamblichus' response. The fact that this distinction was part of that nexus of theological beliefs could help us identify the *De Mysteriis* as having a place on the rhetorical battlefield on which Christians and Hellenes were at odds. As part of this nexus, most inhabitants of the Roman Empire separated the divine world between the daemonic and the divine. The first was passible, and the second was impassible. As is probably reflected by Porphyry's interrogations, many theological altercations resulted in bringing the opponent's divinity down into the sphere of the daemonic. For example, Eusebius and Augustine considered pagan gods to be daemons. Conversely, Porphyry cited an oracle of Hecate that considered Christ to be a simple holy man, meaning that he was not a god, but a daemonic being. Furthermore, magic played an important role in these debates. Indeed, since magic was often thought to be worked with (or against) daemons, to identify someone else's ritual as magic was a good way of "demonizing" the daemonic nature of the divine entities it called upon.[321]

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[319] IAMBLICHUS, *Letter to Dyscolius*, *in* STOBAEUS, *Anthology*, 4.p. 222.14-18 cited by O'MEARA (2003), p. 88. *cf.* also Iamblichus' letter on marriage: STOBAEUS, *Anthology*, 4.p. 587.15-588.2.

[320] LARSEN (1964), p. 14.

[321] Against Flint (1999; p. 322), I think that Late Antiquity did not "demonize" magic. What happened was rather a "magicization" of daemons by Christians, which turned pagan "daimones" (good or evil) into Christian "demons" (invariably evil).

The definition of the holy man was an intensely active front in the theological war between Christians and pagans. The question of human divinization seems to have nourished further skirmishes among the victors since the conflicts between the Nicene orthodoxy and the Arians or Nestorians were also related to the real meaning of Christ's divinity. Revolving around a conception of Christ as more human or more divine, these disputations appear to be an extension of the debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus on the passivity or impassivity of the gods. Iamblichus' position that partially desacralized the soul was not only at odds with Plotinus' undescended soul, but also (in theory at least) against what would become Nicene orthodoxy, for which Christ had a similar position—embodied, but still divine.[322]

In that regard, the Iamblichean and Christian cosmologies were probably closer than is usually thought. Similarly, in the light of Iamblichean theurgy, it is worth reconsidering Christian asceticism and its devaluation of the material world. Neoplatonism is commonly considered as introducing a "new" concept: the abnegation of the body. Yet, by assuming that the soul could have a total control over irrational urges, Stoics and Epicureans ignored the body to a greater extent. By actually according some place to the body (even a bad one), Neoplatonism did not completely negated matter. In fact, Iamblichean theurgy and ascetic literature are often erotic—philosophically, and sometimes, even sexually. Iamblichus and Christian ascetics did not share Greek philosophy's unrelenting faith in rationality and directly engaged the problem of irrational desires. Indeed, if the *rapprochement* is right, like Iamblichean theurgy, the Christians' obsession with the evils of material life could be seen as an attempt to embrace the soul's embodiment. In that regard, Shaw's considerations on Iamblichus' rehabilitation of material rituals should be considered relevant for Christian ideology as well: "Even the densest aspects of matter [...] were potential medicines for a soul diseased by its body, and the cure for a somatic fixation in this theurgic homeopathy was the tail of the (daimonic) dog which bound it."[323] Neoplatonists and Christians probably

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[322] It is also worth noting that Iamblichus was Syrian, like many followers of Arius. Regarding Iamblichus' "Arian" tendencies, *cf.* DM **3.21**.151.10-152.5: "But what indeed is that mixed form of substance [in which the gods are present in the manner of elements]? For if it is a complex of both, it will not be one from two, but something composite and constructed from both. But if as an entity other than the two, the eternal things will be changeable, and divine things will not at all differ from physical things in creation. And it will be absurd that an eternal being should be formed through becoming, but more absurd still is the idea that anything consisting of things eternal will be dissolved."

[323] SHAW (1995), p. 47.

did not negate matter more than their ancestors, they tried to find a philosophical and spiritual system which would enable them to embrace it.

The problem with the Late Antique "age of anxiety," or "utopian world-view"[324] lies in the origin of evil. Since matter was part of the divine plan, neither Plotinus, Iamblichus nor Augustine could convincingly consider matter in itself as the source of evil. For Iamblichus, evil was ignorance,[325] resulting from the alienation of the soul from the universe.[326] If we consider magic as a (frightful) mask covering the incomprehensible, I would argue that evil, for Iamblichus and others, had much to do with magic.

In the early 1970s, Jeanne Favret-Saada went to the Bocage, a rural region of Northern France to study witchcraft. Thanks to her involvement in this misunderstood sub-culture, we can now read how present-day Westerners explained and resolved misfortunes by including them in a secret, "magical underworld." Strangely echoing Iamblichus' struggles with Neoplatonic apophatic doctrines, Favret-Saada also contends with what she called "l'empire du secret." Indeed, for the Bocage's inhabitants, magic is not something about which one talks. But at the same time, magic is almost exclusively an oral phenomenon:[327] "Aussi", Favret-Saada says, "peut-on avancer l'hypothèse que la nomination du sorcier est d'abord une tentative pour contenir dans une figure ce qui, en soi, échappe à la figuration : aussi longtemps qu'est innomé la force qui attire fatalement à elle l'énergie vitale de l'ensorcelé [...] elle ne saurait être qu'absolue."[328] Episodes of magic in the Bocage always involve a bewitched victim (*ensorcelé*), a sorcerer (*sorcier*) and a "healer" (*désorceleur*), who will replace the victim in a magical struggle against the sorcerer.[329] If the healer is *fort assez* ("strong enough"), the spell will backfire on its caster. To illustrate the different stages in the transfer of the magical attack from the victim to the healer, Favret-Saada used the following illustrations:

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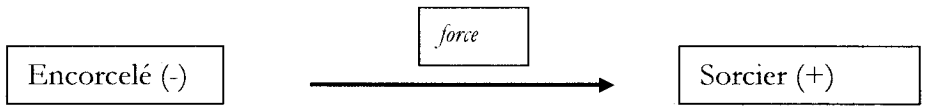
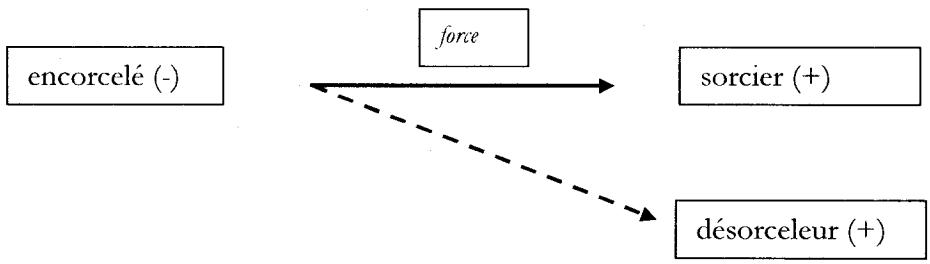
[324] Coined respectively by Dodds (1951), and J.Z. Smith (1978). They both described a devaluation of matter which, since Plotinus in the third century AD, has been an important problem of philosophy.
[325] DM **4.6**.189.12.
[326] DM **4.8**.192.3-8.
[327] FAVRET-SAADA (1977), p. 27; 115-116.
[328] FAVRET-SAADA (1977), p. 132.
[329] FAVRET-SAADA (1977), p. 82.

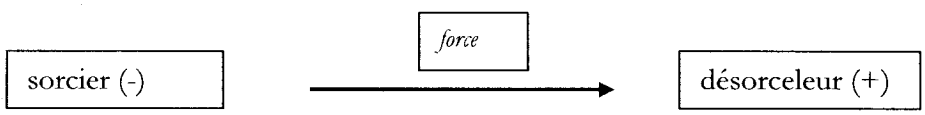
Stage 1. Le moment de la déperdition



Stage 2. Le moment du recours



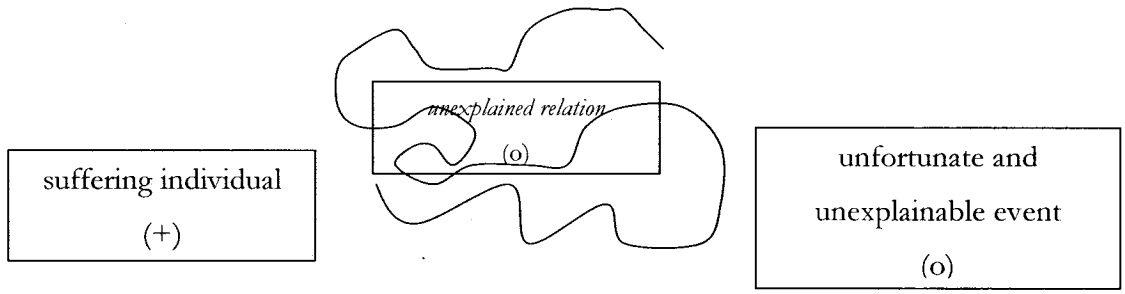
Stage 3. Le moment du retournement



The first stage, called "le moment de la déperdition," happened when people found that they were the victims of magical attacks. Individuals who were *forts* (*i.e.* who were the winners of a magical struggle) are marked by a "+." People who were *faibles* (*i.e.* who were the victims of a magical struggle) are marked with a "-." The arrow shows the flux of life/magical force from the (-) individual to the (+) individual. This transfer of force represents a relation of power, which, in the Bocage, was actually thought to be a violent battle in which either the sorcerer or the victim would eventually die. Moreover, by linking the two individuals, the arrow also represents an intellectual process, in which the bewitched rationalized the absurdity of his situation by creating a polar opposite: the successful sorcerer.

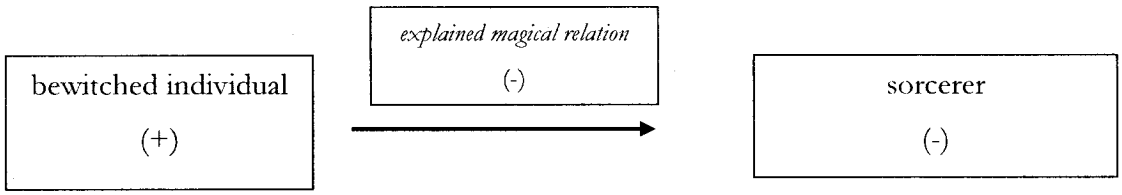
In stage 3, the sorcerer becomes the victim of the healer and is drained of his vital and magical energy. I want now to point to the moment the preceding the *moment de perdtion*, where the bewitched ponders his situation but does not yet know what caused it. Favret-Saada's study implies that, in this stage, magic comes to explain a difficult situation in a social system involving values of good and evil. The "magical underworld," silenced by both ecclesiastical and scientific authorities, fulfills exactly what the "official" systems of healing proposed but failed to do: the rationalization and correction of a random and unhappy situation. The following graphic represent an earlier stage, preceding that in which the victim understands that it is the victim of magical attacks. The relation signified by the arrow is now of an ethical character and the + or – signs no longer represent the flux of life or magical force: (+) is good, (-) is evil, and (o) means no ethical attribution. What stage 0 shows is that the principal function of the relation (the arrow) is to *explain* a given situation.

stage 0. The unexplainable situation



The pointless arrow signifies the absence of a meaningful social system which could elucidate why one is suffering. For that reason, the unfortunate event cannot really be called "evil" because it is still unexplainable. In the following image, the first stage is revisited according to the new ethical relation. Magic comes to reveal the cause of the problem by inserting it in an social system which replace logical deduction (as in medicine) with ethical opposition. Since the workings of magic are secret, being the victim of magical attacks does provide a logical explanation. I argue, however, that it is magic's inherently evil quality which brings satisfaction to the victim's interrogations.

stage 1 (revisited). Le moment de déperdition



In the Bocage, magic replaced an intolerable situation, where somebody was the victim of incomprehensible events, with a magical struggle between a sorcerer and a healer. Practically, the redefinition of the victim's problem through the "magical underworld" rationalized the situation, which in return made salvation possible. In the intellectual process of understanding the cause of evil, magic played a role of ethical polarization. Thus, for the inhabitants of the Bocage, it seemed that the concept of magic explained (and resolved) problems, which would otherwise had remained in the realm of "non-being."

For Iamblichus, the image-creating technique (*i.e.* magic), was a concept used to purge theurgy from glitches in religious evidence. Like a painted mask, Iamblichus applied magic to the face of the unknown. Doing so, he attempted to understand—and vilify—paradoxes breaking the uniformity of his exclusive cosmology:

> While [...] it is odd of some people to attribute color and shape and texture to intelligible forms, by reason of the fact that things participating in them are of such a nature, similarly odd are those who attribute evil to the heavenly bodies, simply because those things participating in them sometimes turn out evil. For there would never have been any such thing as participation [between the gods and matter] in the first place, if the participants had not some divergent element in it [*i.e.* the participation] as well. And if it receives what is participated in as something other and different, *it is just this element (the one that is other) that, in the terrestrial realm, is evil and disordered.*"[330]

In every day life, magic came to explain strange occurrences which messed up the right course of events: the loss of harvest for a farmer, the loss of voice for an orator, or the loss of a consistent cosmology for a philosopher. The last example aptly fits Iamblichus' case. By thoroughly eradicating any statement of Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* which brought rituals too close to magic, Iamblichus' enterprise must be understood as the appropriation of the

[330] DM **1.18**.54-55.

Roman Empire's theological foundations. Even if the *De Mysteriis* left no clear trace of the involvement of Christians in the debate, the sole presence of a work trying to organize cult—and more importantly, trying to define and reject magic—is the testimony of ongoing cultural clashes. As such, the theology presented in the *De Mysteriis* cannot be fully understood without its political framing. Since contact with the divine world was crucial for Late Antique power-mongers, the *De Mysteriis* was political because it was an attempt to regulate religious evidence and magic—whether Christians are, or are not related to this debate.

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